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THE LONDON READER

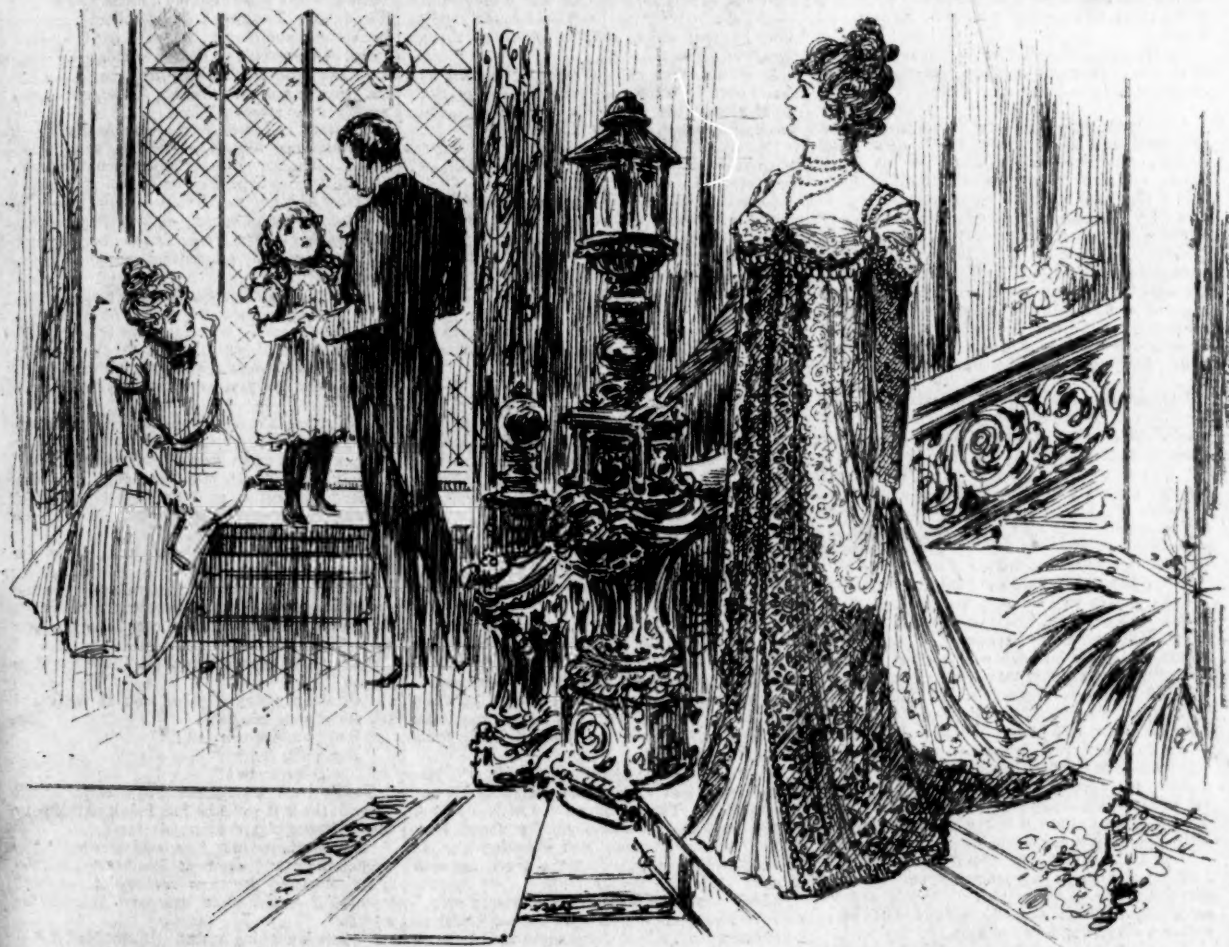
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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"MY MAMMA IS THE PRETTIEST LADY IN ALL THE WORLD!" SAID DOT, PROUDLY.

THE TWO MISS BROWNES.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

FABIAN LILE was one of fortune's favourites—at least, everyone said so, and the young man seldom denied the fact. He was eight-and-twenty, and to outward eyes everything had always gone smoothly with him. While being of a reserved disposition, and not given to revealing his feelings, he never told the friends who congratulated him on his prospects, and wondered why he did not marry, that years ago a woman's falseness had steeled his heart against all domestic joys, and robbed him of all faith in Eve's daughters.

But very few knew the secret of Fabian's life. It was quite an old affair now, for he had only been two-and-twenty when Blanche Delamere jilted him for a richer man. There had been a

private engagement, for, from the first, the beauty thought young Mr. Lile hardly prosperous enough to please her. Perhaps she repented her falseness when, three months after her marriage, she read in the papers that Sir Jocelyn Lile had lost his only son, and Fabian was therefore heir to the baronetcy and a clear income of ten thousand a-year.

It was wonderful the many excellences people discovered in Fabian then. Sir Jocelyn had always hated England, and his son's death made him still more inclined to reside abroad; but though he lingered in Italy he did not neglect his nephew. The family lawyer was empowered to offer Mr. Lile a suitable allowance fitting the baronet's heir, and Fabian, after some demur, accepted it.

"You must understand one thing clearly!" he told Mr. Pemberton. "If my uncle means to stop this allowance if I do not please him, I will have nothing to do with it. I have not seen him for years, but I know a little of his management of his own son. No future wealth, no present

ease, would induce me to put up with half what my cousin endured from his father."

The lawyer smiled. He had managed the Lile affairs for twenty years, and understood Sir Jocelyn thoroughly.

"I made a remark of that very nature to your uncle," he said, suavely. "I told him he could hardly expect to exert any authority over a nephew he had not seen since childhood, and he replied he had no wish to. You were the heir to his title, and he wished you to have means to support the dignity of that position. Fifteen hundred a year is secure to you as long as he lives if you care to accept it."

"On what conditions?"

"On no conditions at all!"

Still Fabian hesitated.

"My dream is to be an artist. Of course to have ample means to study and travel for the next few years would be almost a guarantee of success; but if Sir Jocelyn is the man I fancy he could not resist interference. If he heard of my choosing a profession I know he does not much

ateem, would he not write threatening to stop my allowance, &c.?"

"He will not have it in his power to do so. By his wife's settlements he enjoys a life interest in her property. This is the sum he proposes to make over to you. When he has resigned his claims on Lady Lisle's estate in your favour he will have no power to alter his mind. Until he dies the income is yours."

Sir Jocelyn was not an old man; besides, neither Fabian nor the lawyer took into account the contingency of his death. It seemed to both that the young man's prospects were secure. Only his uncle's death would deprive him of a very ample allowance, and that death would give him a fair estate and an income of ten thousand a year!

Fabian accepted. He wrote a few brief lines of thanks to his uncle, and received the following eccentric reply:—

"YOUNG MAN,—You have no cause to thank me, for what I have done is for the sake of my name, and not for you. You are the last of the Lisles, and must keep up a respectable position. I hate England, and shall never return to it. If you like to spend any time at Lisle Court the servants have orders to receive you as its master. You need not trouble to write again unless you contemplate marriage. Not that I have the slightest wish to interfere in your choice. If you married a flower-girl I shouldn't attempt to prevent it; but I am the head of the family, and therefore I consider I have a right to know of your taking such a decided step—that's all!"

"He must be mad!" said the artist, calling on Mr. Pemberton a day or two after receiving this somewhat peculiar epistle. "What man in his senses would write so!"

"He's no more mad than you are," replied the lawyer, gravely; "but I grant he's peculiar. However, Mr. Lisle, you can't accuse him of making many demands upon you. In the event of your marriage you would naturally have written to him, even if he had not asked it."

"Of course; but I am not likely to marry."

"Many men say so, and then change their minds. At your age, Mr. Lisle, one would hardly believe you a confirmed celibate."

But six years had come and gone without Fabian undergoing that change of mind suggested by the lawyer—years that had left their mark on him too, changing him from the bright-faced stripling who had been Blanche Delamere's victim into a grave, thoughtful-looking man of eight-and-twenty—an art connoisseur, one whose verdict was deemed conclusive in all matters of taste; but who, though possessing great talents, had yet given no picture to the world that should bring fame to his name.

"An artist's spite," an old R.A. once termed Fabian; and while this judgment was severe, it must be admitted the wealth which might have smoothed Fabian's path to success had been rather a stumbling-block to him.

Regarded by all as the heir of Lisle, courted on all sides, society made heavy claims on the young man, and made great inroads on his time. Then, too, he had one of those natures which aim high. He would give to the world nothing but his best; and so year after year passed, and the Exhibitions contained nothing from his brush, while the great picture on which he had resolved to rest his claims to fame was still unfinished in his atelier.

He had heard nothing more of his uncle. From time to time he went down to the Court, where he ruled in all things as its master. He entertained friends there for the shooting. Once he kept Christmas there in good old English fashion. It was signified to him by Mr. Pemberton all the cost of such hospitality would be defrayed by Sir Jocelyn.

No wonder people said Fabian was one of fortune's favourites. No wonder he found little time for good hard work. He was too courted, too sought after. Life was made too easy for him.

It was June. Six years had come and gone since Blanche Delamere broke her word, and Fabian had never cared since then to look at a

woman's face. He was courteous and attentive to ladies in society, but he had never given one of them a second thought. Now he sat alone in his pleasant studio, and a strangely grave expression swept across his face. He was asking himself whether, after all, Sir Jocelyn's liberality had been for his real good.

"Six years ago," he muttered, half dreamily, "I had little to depend upon but my paint-brush. I thought if only I were relieved from the pressing need to think of daily wants fame would surely come. Well, the need has vanished, but I am no nearer fame."

There came upon him a wild idea of starting for Italy at once, of cutting the thread which bound him to his present carefree life, and settling down to hard, steady work as eagerly as though his bread depended on it.

After all, what did he care for fashion and amusement? Would not fame be more precious to him than the attention he received merely because he was the heir of Lisle?

He roused himself at last by an effort, brought down his hand heavily on the table, and exclaimed:—

"I will do it! Surely I can free myself from the chains of this pleasure-seeking life, and work before it is too late! Surely I can win fame yet! It did not seem so difficult six years ago."

He was interrupted; the small boy who acted as tiger, page, valet combined, to Fabian, appeared.

"There's a gentleman, sir, says he must see you. I told him you were engaged, but he won't take no for an answer."

"Who is it, Thomas?"

"I don't know, sir. He's very old," said Thomas, with a stress on the very, which implied, in his opinion, the visitor was decidedly the senior of Methuselah. "He's standing in the hall, sir; and it's my belief he won't go till he's seen you."

Fabian rose with a half-sigh.

"It can't be a dun," he muttered to himself, "for I have kept out of debt, whatever other follies I have plunged into." Then aloud, "You'd better ask him into the library, Thomas. I'll be there directly."

For Mr. Lisle rented a charming little house in old Brompton. It had been built by a brother artist, and gladly let to Fabian by his widow, whose death removed the painter to a fairer world even than that depicted in his own pictures. Built all on one floor, with few rooms, but those few large and lofty, it was just the thing for a bachelor's dwelling!

Fabian walked leisurely into the library, just a little surprised at the persistency of his unknown guest. The intruder stood with his back to the fireplace, looking critically about him. Fabian was dimly conscious of something familiar in his face, but no notion of the truth came to him.

"I see you have forgotten me, young man," said the stranger. "You make a great favour of receiving callers. The Lisles never used to be so unsocial."

"I am not unsocial to my friends," returned Fabian, coldly. "I fancy most people are shy of strangers who refuse to state either their name or business."

The old man drew himself up.

"I should have thought you would have recognised me.—I am Lisle of Lisle."

Fabian started. A visit from Sir Jocelyn was about as unexpected an honour as the immediate arrival of the millennium.

"My uncle!"

"I suppose so. Your father's brother, anyway. You have a look of poor Claude about your eyes, but you favour your mother chiefly."

Fabian felt utterly at a loss. What was the object of Sir Jocelyn's coming? Had he come to stay? It would be quite in keeping with his general behaviour to arrive unexpectedly on a long visit!

"Won't you sit down?" he began, somewhat awkwardly, feeling quite out of his element. "Have you come straight from Germany?"

Sir Jocelyn sat down, slowly and deliberately, as though he considered the operation, but he continued to stare. Fabian decided it was a

habit, and the old man could not help it. His nephew had done nothing to be ashamed of, and yet he did not like that long continued scrutiny.

"I have been in England two days," observed the Baronet, deliberately. "I return to Magdadorf to-morrow. I detest England—always did."

The latter was not quite true. Once upon a time, as a young man, Sir Jocelyn had been a great deal in London, and taken a full share in its pleasure. It was only after his wife's death that he had expatriated himself. He had lived for years in different German towns, and at one of these married a second wife, much to his son's displeasure. The new Lady Lisle hardly survived her stepson, and they never met; but the general impression received in England, mainly by young Lisle's representations, was that the match had been very much beneath his father, and a step greatly to be regretted.

All this increased poor Fabian's discomfort. He would not allude to his late aunt or his cousin. He knew of no one else connected with Sir Jocelyn. The Baronet's last speech had relieved him of one dread—he would not be called on to keep his uncle on a prolonged visit. This fear being removed Fabian waxed hospitable, and rather warmly pressed Sir Jocelyn to stay to lunch.

"I have dined" (it was about half-past twelve), "I always dine early. I shall not detain you long, young man. I only want a little rational conversation with you if you'll sit down quietly and not stand there fidgeting with that paper-knife as though you were trying to snap it in two!"

Fabian felt like a scolded boy. He sat down as requested, and sincerely wished the interview over, and his uncle safely back at Magdadorf. Usually Mr. Lisle was considered a fluent speaker, but on this occasion he could think of nothing to say—not a single idea would come into his head.

"You may remember, young man, I sent you a letter some time ago?"

"Six years," replied Fabian, relieved at having something to say. "I remember it perfectly."

"I have been expecting to hear from you ever since."

"Why, you expressly told me I need not write to you!"

"On the contrary, I asked you to write and tell me of your marriage."

"But I am not married!"

"Nor going to be!"

"Nor going to be!"

To Fabian's amazement Sir Jocelyn looked pleased, the first smile he had indulged in during the interview played about his lips.

"I hate uncertainty," he said slowly. "I've written now and again to Pemberton, but he always declared he knew nothing of you, so I thought I would come over and find out for myself."

"There is nothing to find out, Sir Jocelyn."

The old man looked at his nephew impressively, with a strange twinkle in his small, beady black eyes.

"You may resent the question, boy. In these days young men give themselves airs, but after me you are the last of the Lisles, and I think I have a right to take an interest in you."

"I never thought of denying your right, uncle. On the contrary, I shall be glad to tell you anything you want to know."

"Then are you engaged to be married?"

"Certainly not!"

"There was an account in the papers of your dancing with a Miss Lascelles at some fancy ball!"

Fabian laughed.

"It was a children's ball, Sir Jocelyn. Lascelles is one of my oldest friends, and his daughter is five years old!"

"Oh!"

No mistaking the relief in the tone this time. "And since you have asked me, Sir Jocelyn, I don't mind doing more than answer your question. I am not engaged, and, what is more, there is no one in the world I have the slightest wish to marry!"



"That's bad," said the old man, slowly. "What's to become of this title, pray, if you don't marry?"

"Time enough for that, sir," replied Fabian. "I am only twenty-eight; even if I wait for twenty years, I shall not be too old to think of matrimony!"

"Very sensibly spoken!" said Sir Jocelyn, approvingly. "You must be a very praiseworthy young man!"

Fabian wondered whether his uncle would have expressed this opinion had he known of the episode of *Blanche Delamere*.

"I'm no better than other people," he returned, a little uncomfortably; "but a *Lisle* never breaks his word, Sir Jocelyn, and you may rely on mine."

"I should like to know more of you," said the Baronet, graciously. "I think we should get on admirably together!"

Fabian decidedly differed, but he managed to mutter something about "very kind," which did for a reply.

"I am sure you would like Magdorsdorf," pursued the Baronet. "I wish you would come and stay with me."

A slight pause. Mr. *Lisle* had not the slightest wish to go to Magdorsdorf, but, on the other hand, for six years he had accepted a handsome income from Sir Jocelyn, and there seemed something ungrateful in refusing his uncle's first request.

"In a month's time London will be emptying," pursued the Baronet. "What are your plans for the autumn?"

"I mean to go to Italy for the winter. I had not any particular plans for the time between."

"Then come to Magdorsdorf," said Sir Jocelyn, hospitably, "and if we get on together as well as I expect, it is just possible I might go to *Lisle* with you for the partridge-shooting."

Wonder of wonders! Sir Jocelyn had never set foot in his home since the death of his first wife. It had been rumoured he never meant to enter *Lisle* again.

"I am very much obliged to you," said Fabian, slowly, "and I will certainly come to Magdorsdorf the end of next month!"

He did not say a word of "pleasure" or "gladness." Fabian was singularly particular about tender speaking. He would go to Magdorsdorf, but he would not pretend that he was at all charmed by the prospect.

Sir Jocelyn was quite satisfied. He rose to go.

"I wish you would have taken something!" said Fabian, a little troubled at the refusal of his hospitality. "Won't you have a glass of wine?"

The Baronet shook his head.

"Nothing, thank you. You will write and fix a day for your visit, Fabian! Good-bye, my boy. I am very glad to have seen you!"

He shook hands warmly with his nephew and departed, leaving Fabian to wonder vaguely whether the whole incident had not been a dream.

CHAPTER II.

It was three weeks later, a lovely July day, and the warm rays of the summer sun fell upon a young girl as she sat alone in a quaint, foreign-looking room, whose bare polished floor, high tideous above and general sanctness of furniture proclaimed it to be in Germany.

But though the room was unmistakably foreign you could not possibly have taken the girl for anything but English, even though she had passed more than half her life in the Fatherland. There was nothing German about her. The slight graceful figure, looking so slender, the brown hair to which the sunshine gave a golden shade, the large, dark blue eyes, the clear, delicate complexion—all bespoke Kathleen's nationality. She was English in everything, although it was more than twelve years since she left her own country, and in all that time she had never paid it even a passing visit, and the father, who in all else gratified her slightest wish, refused positively when she begged him to show her the beauties of her own land.

But just now Kathleen would not have cared had anyone told her she would never see England again. Just now the poor girl had no pleasurable anticipations of the country she had remembered so fondly through her long exile. Her father was dead. His trusted friend and lawyer had just arrived to attend his funeral and take his orphan child to London, and poor Kathleen in her desolation felt as though her whole future was a blank.

There had been no long illness to prepare her for her loss—no long aught of constant suffering to teach her to rejoice that her father was where there is no more pain.

Sir Jocelyn *Lisle* had been well and strong when he left the house in the morning. A kick from a runaway horse had done the mischief. He was brought home only to die, his last words a blessing upon his Katy, his last breath a prayer for her happiness.

Poor child! Three days ago an idolized, petted girl, and now alone in the world!

That afternoon her father had been buried. It was his own desire that he should be in the pleasant German village instead of being taken back to England to rest among the ashes of his kindred.

Mr. Pemberton had taken every care of Kathleen's shoulders, had made every arrangement, and now on the morrow she was to accompany him to England. This was her last evening in the old home.

The lawyer came in presently—a strange, troubled look upon his kindly face.

"Miss Browne, you asked me to come and explain things to you, so I am here; but, indeed, I think it would be better if you listened to my advice, and postponed all such thoughts until you are stronger."

"I am quite well," said Kathleen, simply, "and I would much rather you told me now. My father told me when he was dying he was sorry he had left me a legacy of trouble, and that I could trust his nephew, Fabian *Lisle*, as himself. What legacy could it mean, Mr. Pemberton? And how is that my cousin whom he so trusted, and to whom he had been so generous, could not spare a few hours from his life of pleasure to pay the last tribute of respect to the head of his family?"

"Believe me, Miss Brown, you are too severe. Sir Fabian *Lisle* would be the last to slight the sad duty you have mentioned; but he is travelling, and no one knows his address. He left home a week ago for a sketching tour which was to bring him to Magdorsdorf the end of this month, so that it has been impossible to communicate with him."

"You seem to have a good opinion of him," said Kathleen, bitterly. "I think he treated father disgracefully. He has never taken the least notice of him all these years."

"It was at Sir Jocelyn's express wish."

"You are sure?"

"I am positive. I will give you a proof of it. Did not he always express himself as satisfied with his nephew?"

"Perfectly. But I thought that was his kindness of heart. I always felt angry."

Poor Mr. Pemberton sighed. He had a task of unusual difficulty before him as it was, but if Miss Browne had a prejudice against the new Baronet, it seemed to him his position was even more trying than he expected.

"I entreat you not to judge Sir Fabian," he said very gravely. "Your father told you to trust him. He was, as you confess, perfectly satisfied with his nephew's conduct. I have explained to you Sir Fabian's absence from the funeral was no fault of his own. Surely, therefore, you will try and put aside any imaginary prejudice you may feel against him!"

"I am not given to imaginary prejudices," replied Kathleen, coldly. "I shall be civil to the young man if I meet him in England, but I have not the slightest wish to see much of him."

Mr. Pemberton remembered his task, and groaned again and again. He wished Sir Jocelyn had taken his advice; but alas! it was too late now. The Baronet had gone over to the great

majority, and no human powers could change the condition of his last will and testament.

"Are you aware, my dear young lady, of your late father's wishes? I mean, did he explain to you at all the nature of his will?"

Kathleen shook her head.

"He was so well, you see! Who would have expected him to die? He was only seventy. He told me he had taken care of me, and that he feared he had left me a legacy of trouble. He said you would explain it."

"I shall be most happy," which was not strictly true. "I think you are of age, Miss Browne?"

"I was twenty-one last month."

"Ah! Then you are your own mistress, otherwise I should have had the honour of being your guardian."

"I am sure you would have been a kind one," said Kathleen, sweetly.

"You know that Sir Jocelyn was a widower when he married your mother. A widower with one son, while Mrs. Browne had an only daughter—yourself!"

Kathleen nodded.

"And the son said cruel things of my mother. I was only ten years old, but I remember. Do you know, Mr. Pemberton, when the news came he was dead, I couldn't feel sorry."

"He was an idle, worthless fellow!" agreed the lawyer; "had he not been, the present state of things could not have existed."

"What state of things?"

"I am coming to it. Of course you have heard of *Lisle*, Miss Browne. *Lisle* Court, I mean?"

"It was the one wish of my life to go there. I knew, little as he cared for England, papa used to glory in being *Lisle* of *Lisle*. He half promised to take me there this autumn. Well"—and she gave a little sigh—"I shall never see it now!"

"Why not?"

"It will be Sir Fabian's!" the girl lifted her head proudly; "and though papa used to call him my cousin, of course I know perfectly he is really no relation, and I don't suppose a Baronet of *Lisle* Court will care to be friendly with a Miss Browne of nowhere."

"Sir Fabian has no idea of your existence. When his son made so many unkind remarks about his second marriage, your stepfather grew very reserved about his domestic affairs. Until I came here to your mother's funeral I had no idea he possessed a daughter. Sir Jocelyn laid his express commands on me to keep the fact a secret."

"I wonder why?"

The lawyer did not.

"Sir Fabian has enjoyed fifteen hundred a year ever since his cousin's death. He has looked on himself as heir of *Lisle*. Until a few weeks ago I myself believed that it must one day be his."

"It must be his now!" answered Kathleen. "It is entailed, and must go to the next heir. Even if I had been papa's own child, Kathleen *Lisle*, Sir Fabian must have had the Court!"

"No!"

Kathleen looked amazed.

"Why not?"

"It seems Sir Jocelyn and his son combined secretly to cut off the entail. The heir received a large sum of money, which he ran through long before his death, and Sir Jocelyn gained the right to dispose of *Lisle* Court and its revenues as he pleased."

Kathleen grew very pale; but the true state of the case did not dawn on her even then.

"Papa could not leave it away from his nephew," she said, firmly; "it would have been a cruel injustice. Fabian never vexed him. He approved entirely of his conduct, and so why should he disinhernt him?"

"Sir Jocelyn has left *Lisle* Court and its revenues to his nephew on one condition—shall I tell you what it is? Do you think you can bear it?"

"I should like to know!"

"Sir Fabian will be *Lisle* of *Lisle* on one condition only—that he marries you within a year of his uncle's death!"

"And if I refuse?"

Neither by word or sign had she betrayed her

intense amazement. She stood there with flashing eyes as she asked the question. She was plainly indignant, but no other emotion was visible.

"If you refuse," said the lawyer, calmly, "the estate and its revenues are sequestered for the term of Sir Fabian's life. They pass at his death to his eldest son, with entail on his descendants."

"And I?"

"I should have told you first, whatever happens you are free from care. The whole of Sir Jocelyn's savings are settled on you. The interest will be yours for life, and you can dispose of the principal by will. Your step-father crippled himself by paying all his son's debts; but even now you will come into a very fair income—about twelve hundred a year—of which nothing can deprive you."

"And Sir Fabian?"

"He loses his present income absolutely. If you and he can comply with Sir Jocelyn's wishes, he will be Lisle of Lisle—a wealthy Baronet. If you refuse, he will at least have the comfort of knowing his children are provided for."

"And if he refuses?" asked Kathleen, gravely. "You seem to forget that contingency, Mr. Pemberton!"

"The consequences are the same in either case. Whichever party refuses the compact, the estates remain requested until there is a new Baronet."

"Father might well say he left me a legacy of trouble. He loved me dearly. Oh! Mr. Pemberton, how could he do it!"

The lawyer hesitated.

"I think," he said at last, "Sir Jocelyn loved you so well he would have done anything to see you mistress of Lisle. He would not wrest the place from his own family entirely; but he did all he could to make you Lady Lisle. I know, as a fact, he would never have made this will but that his nephew confessed his affections were disengaged!"

"Then he knows!"

"He knows nothing, poor fellow! At this moment he has no idea the entail is cut off. Sir Jocelyn appealed to his feelings to answer a question truly, and he agreed. The question proved 'was he engaged?' He replied, 'no; and he did not know anyone he should care to marry.' Sir Jocelyn invited him to Magdendorf, and considered it well-nigh certain he would surrender his affections to your keeping."

"It is very hard on him!" said Kathleen, simply; "cruelly hard!"

"Not if you will only consider your father's wishes. Seriously, Miss Browne, Fabian Lisle is a man—apart from wealth and rank—any girl might be proud of as a lover."

"As a lover!" repeated Kathleen slowly; "but not if she felt he married her just to save his property!"

"If only you had seen him."

Her face flushed.

"I am thankful I have not. If anything in the world could make my position more painful, it would be to have seen and known Sir Fabian!"

"I don't see it."

Kathleen put one hand wearily to her head, and seemed lost in thought.

"You say he was to be here this month! You have no certainty of hearing from him until then!"

"No. But you need fear no difficulties. I propose to leave a long letter for him here, and a copy of your father's will. I shall ask him to come straight to London, and if only you will consent to be our guest, my wife will perform the needful introduction."

Kathleen shook her head.

"I shall come," she said, gently, "but not yet. This has altered everything. I simply could not meet Sir Fabian Lisle until I have got over the shock of this news!"

"Then where would you go?"

"My old governess has opened a school for girls at Clifton. I will go and stay with her for a few weeks, and you must promise me not to

give Sir Fabian my address, or do anything that could bring about a meeting."

"But, my dear child, you must see him sooner or later!"

"Then let it be later," said Kathleen, decidedly. "He will hate me too much not to be thankful for the delay. Mr. Pemberton, if Sir Fabian or I died before the year of grace expired, what would be the fate of Lisle?"

"If you die, Sir Fabian enters at once upon his inheritance. Oddly enough, there is no provision made for the contingency of his death; it must have been an oversight. But, my dear young lady, I hope there will be no talk of either of your dying. I trust to draw your marriage settlement before I am many months older!"

Kathleen shook her head.

"I don't think anyone will do that. Mr. Pemberton, will you take me to England tomorrow, and put me into the train for Clifton?"

"I will take you there myself!"

"I would rather go there alone. I assure you Miss Brooks, my old governess, will welcome me kindly. She has a thriving school there, and will take every care of me."

"I would much rather you came to us."

"And dread Sir Fabian's arrival at every knock! It would be torture! Let me have a month's retirement at Clifton, Mr. Pemberton, and I promise you I will come to London and be introduced to Sir Fabian—if he wishes it."

The lawyer yielded. He was very sorry for both the pair whose fate the dead man's match-making had so entangled. And so it came about that he took Kathleen to England, and was as kind and considerate as though she had been his own child, and put her into the train for Clifton, at the very moment when Sir Fabian, all unconscious of the change in his fortunes, reached Magdendorf.

CHAPTER III.

Miss Brooks had been a governess for more than twenty years, and in that time had lived in five or six different families, but she had never been happier anywhere than in Sir Jocelyn's foreign home, and had never loved any pupil better than Kathleen Browne. The Baronet would gladly have prolonged her stay with them even after Katy's education was completed; but the spinster's ambition had always been to start a school of her own, which would give a home to her widowed mother and provide employment for two or three of the half-dozen orphan nieces a dying brother had left helpless in the world.

Sir Jocelyn could not wonder at such a wish as this, and right generously he assisted Miss Brooks to carry out her scheme. A cheque for five hundred pounds was his parting gift to her, and his name figured at the head of the long list of "references" which graced Miss Brook's prospectus, while the kind-hearted woman, in return for these favours, remembered the little family at Magdendorf with a gratitude time seemed powerless to weaken, and cherished a secret hope that some day or other the favourite pupil might be spared to her in a visit.

But things in this world have a peculiar knack of happening at the wrong moment. The establishment at Clifton had broken up for the long vacation the very day of Sir Jocelyn's death, and Miss Brooks had started on a short visit to Yorkshire.

The widow of the brother before alluded to lived there, a weak and rather helpless person, who seemed afflicted with a marvellous habit of running into debt.

Susanna Brooks had paid her bills again and again till even the lady's own daughters felt their aunt's generosity was imposed on; and so it had been planned, as soon as the school was free from the five-and-thirty boarders, its principal should go herself to Whitby and see what her dear head and sound judgment could do towards putting a little order in her sister-in-law's affairs.

There remained in charge of Paragon Villa Emma Brooks, a pleasant clever-looking girl of

two-and-twenty, and the mother, for whose sake chiefly Susanna had sacrificed her luxurious position in Sir Jocelyn's family.

Emma was her aunt's right hand, and was left with full authority to act as mistress of Paragon House, and open all the principal's letters.

"Remember," had been Miss Brooks's parting charge, "if that young lady who is coming to take the junior class next term can't find a holiday engagement, I have told her she can come here. Be as kind to her as you can, dear, for she is an orphan, and I fancy your letter has had a hard time of it lately."

"All right, auntie. Miss Browne, isn't her name?"

"Yes. I think that alone would incline me to like her. It reminds me of my dear child at Magdendorf!"

"Perhaps she knows her!" suggested Emma, whose knowledge of foreign lands was scanty, "as she has been at school in Germany."

"Germany is a large place," said the principal. "Anyway, Emma, try and make the poor girl feel at home!"

Emma promised readily.

Three days after her aunt started she opened two letters addressed to her. One was from the young governess, the other from Sir Jocelyn's stepdaughter, and, oddly enough, both girls announced their arrival at Clifton by the same train on that very afternoon.

"Aunt Susy will be home on Monday," mused Emma. "I don't think I will write to her; she wouldn't get a letter before Monday morning, and a telegram would only frighten her. If Miss Browne is as charming as auntie says, she would much rather she was not worried. She will be home on Monday without fail, so I think I will not disturb her."

Miss Emma (as she was called in the establishment) made every arrangement for the comfort of the two Miss Brownes, and she drove down to the station in good time for the train, wondering a little in her own mind how she should identify two girls, neither of whom she had ever seen before.

She waited fully half-an-hour, and then she grew uneasy.

Little knots of people had gathered on the platform, and were eagerly discussing the non-arrival of the train, while the porters made no preparations for its coming, and returned short and rather abrupt answers to the questions with which they were beset.

It was quite a relief to Emma to recognise the doctor who attended the inmates of Paragon House, and she went up to him for information.

"I hope you were not expecting Miss Brooks by this train?" he said, gravely.

"Oh, no!" returned the girl. "My aunt will not be here till Monday; but I am waiting for two young ladies."

"Friends of yours?"

"I have never seen either of them. One is our new junior teacher, the other an old pupil of Aunt Susanna's."

"Then the truth will not terrify you, and as it is. There is no doubt that there has been an accident. The officials have been trying to keep it secret, but a telegram has just come saying there has been a collision with a goods train. The extent of the mischief cannot be estimated; but they are going to send off an engine with one carriage containing helpers. They have asked me to go, and I will take you with me, if you like."

"I will send one of these boys with a message to grandmother, Dr. Gale, and then I will thankfully accept your kind offer. Where is the tunnel?"

"Five miles off—help would have to come from here. The other stations near are more villages."

Emma shivered.

"I hope Auntie won't see the report in the papers! It would terrify her to death!"

"Most people will think it applies to the other Clifton. There is some comfort in insignificant, Miss Emma. I doubt if a hundred people out of Devonshire know that the county boasts of a town called Clifton."

It was a very silent journey. Though both the girls, whose fate was so uncertain, were utter strangers to her, Emma felt strangely anxious. Her aunt would grieve bitterly over the heiress, and Emma's own story was so similar to that of the young teacher's that she could not help feeling a keen interest in her.

Dr. Gale insisted on her waiting in the train while he went forward to make inquiries. He soon returned, although the five minutes seemed hours to poor Emma.

"Twelve killed and five injured," he said, with the calm matter-of-fact manner so natural to doctors. "They have taken the injured on to Netherton station. It is only half a mile, and I will show you the way if you like to come."

They found Netherton a scene of mingled confusion and distress. Many of those killed were inhabitants of the little sleepy village, for after Exeter the train was only a local one, and the terminus was the next station beyond Clifton. Of the twelve silent forms eleven had already been identified by sorrowing friends. Emma went into the little waiting-room where the injured had been carried, and bent over a girl with a sweet face and golden hair who was just recovering from a swoon—a slight delicate creature, with a sad, wistful expression, dressed plainly in deep mourning, and with a pitiful pleading look in her blue eyes which went straight to Emma's heart.

"You are better now," said the kind-hearted girl gently. "Were you going to Clifton?"

"Yes, to Miss Brooks."

Emma bent and kissed her.

"I assure you are Miss Browne."

"Yes. Do you know Miss Brooks?"

"She is my aunt. She is not at home just now, but I live with her, and I came to meet you." Then, as the tears welled up into the beautiful eyes. "You must not cry, everyone loves Aunt Susy. Paragon House is more like a home than a school, and we will try to make you happy."

"Then you expected me!" said the girl, in a strange absent manner.

"Surely. Auntie told me you might perhaps like to come straight to us even though it was the holidays, and I think the rest will be good for you. You look as though you had been working much too hard in that foreign school."

The girl smiled half-faintly.

"I always wanted to come to England."

"And do you feel well enough for me to leave you for a few minutes? I am expecting another young lady by this train, another Miss Browne."

"She was in the train with me," came slowly from the stranger's trembling lips. "The guard put her in when I changed at Exeter, and she told me she was coming to Miss Brooks and, that like me, she had been in Germany for years."

"Yes. Auntie lived there with her as her governess. Her coming is a great surprise, but I know it will be a pleasure to Auntie."

Emma sped away on her search, and the girl she had left rose slowly to her feet, and, putting one hand to her aching head as though to soothe its pain, she murmured to herself,—

"That would be a way out of it. I see a means to escape if only I might take it. It would be wronging no one, and I know my dear old friend would not tell anyone."

Emma had found Dr. Gale on the platform, and to him she put a question which seemed to discompose him.

"Those who escaped unhurt have gone to their homes. They were all Clifton folks whom I knew well by sight; all the injured have been identified, except the girl you have just left."

"Our junior teacher."

"Oh! Dr. Gale looked at her thoughtfully. "You are quite sure both the ladies you expected were in this train?"

"I am positive! Miss Browne has just told me her name was put in the same carriage as herself at Exeter."

"And you would know her?"

"I have never seen her. I have a vague impression she is fair."

"Then you had better come here."

He led the way to a little shed close by, where

something very still and motionless was lying on a rough table, the face reverently covered with a white cloth. Dr. Gale took the wrapper away, and Emma saw a young girl, apparently about one-and-twenty. Like the junior teacher she was fair and slight; indeed, the same description might have applied to both, though there was no resemblance between them if seen together. One blue bruise on the broad, white forehead seemed to say the girl had been thrown face forward against the carriage. The tears came into Emma's eyes.

"She looks so young to die," she whispered to the doctor, "and so pretty. There must be hearts aching for her somewhere."

Dr. Gale shook his head.

"It is the face of one who has known much sorrow, Miss Emma," he said, quietly; "don't grieve her her rest."

Emma felt convinced her aunt's old pupil was before her, but still she had no proof. She stood there half inclined to doubt still, when Dr. Gale pointed to a little heap of trifles lying at the foot of the rough bier.

"These were in her pocket."

Little enough in themselves, but still confirming the theory. A cambric handkerchief marked with the initial "B" in fine embroidery, and exhaling the odour of a delicate perfume; a small handbag, with the K. B. wrought into an elegant monogram; a purse well stocked with money.

"It must be she!" said Emma, faintly. Then a voice at her elbow startled her, and she saw the face of the young teacher.

"Yes," said the latter, her eyes fixed on the still, quiet form, and steadily evading Emma's glance; "this is the young lady who travelled with me from Exeter. She told me herself her name was Browne, and that she was going to Paragon House. Oh!" and a burst of passionate weeping almost drowned the girl's words, "why was I not taken too? Why could I not die instead of her?"

Emma Brooks and Miss Browne returned home under Dr. Gale's care, and at the express desire of the elder girl that poor quiet form was conveyed later on to Paragon House.

Emma felt almost worn out with agitation. Dr. Gale took all the necessary directions off her hands, and confirmed her belief that it was useless to send to Miss Brooks, since, unless she had a special train, she could not reach them before the time she had originally named—Monday.

The inquest was to be on that day, and Dr. Gale arranged for the funeral to be on Thursday. Meanwhile, at his suggestion, telegrams were sent to Magdalen announcing Miss Browne's death, and the date of her funeral.

"It will half kill her father," said poor Emma; "he was a widower, and she was the light of his eyes!"

"Poor man! And you think Mr. Browne will be here at once?"

"I think he will come; but he is not Mr. Browne. She was only his stepchild—he is Sir Jocelyn Lisle of Lisle."

Dr. Gale started. He was somewhat more up in the news of the outer world than the simple Emma.

"My dear young lady, Sir Jocelyn Lisle can never come here. Is it possible you did not know that he died last week?"

Emma started.

"Then that explains her coming so suddenly, so unexpectedly. Her letter to auntie only said she was in great trouble, and was sure, for old times' sake, she would help her."

"Don't you know anything of her other friends?"

"I never heard of anyone but her father."

"The new Baronet must be a connection. I had better send the telegrams to him."

It was late on Monday when Miss Brooks reached home. Emma had met her aunt at Exeter, and broken the sad news to her. Susanna felt almost as though she had lost a child of her own.

"It seems cruel to say it, Emma; but oh! why was this one taken and the other left! A poor friendless governess, who had no home, might well welcome death; but my darling

Katy, whose life was like a gleam of sunshine, it seems incredible!"

"That is what she said, auntie—Miss Browne. Do you know I think she is really sorry it was not she who was taken. I want you to be very kind to her, please, for I have grown fond of her already."

"Poor child! Of course I will be kind to her. She must have had a terrible shock."

"She looks like a little white ghost. I wanted her to come to meet us, but she begged to stay at home, and she has such a strange fancy. Auntie, she wants to see you first, quite alone. She seems to have got it into her head, poor girl, that she has injured you, because she wasn't killed instead of your own Kathleen."

Miss Brooks wiped her eye, and said she would go and make acquaintance with her new teacher as soon as ever she had spoken to her mother, and taken off her things. Emma took her to the door.

"You won't be long, auntie, and do bring her down to supper! It is just ready!"

Miss Brooks opened the door gently, and closed it after her; then she went towards a low chair by the window, where a slight black-robed figure sat motionless. She wondered a little her new governess did not advance to meet her. Then the girl turned round, and poor Miss Brooks uttered a startled cry. Never in the whole course of the fifty years had such a surprise befallen her.

"My dear, my dear!" she cried, when she had recovered her faculties sufficiently to speak at all. "How could you do it! How could you think of such a thing!"

"I didn't!" said Kathleen, clinging to her kind, old friend with an April face of smiles and tears. "It was Miss Emma!"

"Emma never acted a part in her life. She is a great deal too matter-of-fact."

"I mean she took it for granted I was your junior teacher! And oh, Susy, dear, if you knew now I had longed to die—it seemed as if Heaven itself had given me the chance of letting Miss Emma make the mistake!"

"But," said Miss Brooks, utterly mystified, "the mistake must be set right at once, and poor Emma will be much mortified."

Kathleen groaned out the story of her step-father's will.

"Susy, dear, I have been perfectly wretched ever since. Here was I literally offered to a man I had never seen, and if I refused to marry him he lost his fortune. I tell you, Susy, I did not have a moment's peace. Whichever way I decided I must injure Sir Fabian and now it will be quite easy!"

"I don't see it," groaned Miss Brooks.

"Why, Sir Fabian and all the world will think I am dead! He will be Lisle of Lisle, and I—I shall be free."

"And you have been brought up as an heiress. You have never known a will disgruntled!"

"I shall be quite rich still," said Kathleen, simply, "if you will help me."

"My darling, I can't help you," said poor Miss Brooks. "I never acted a part in my life. The first person who asked me a question I should betray all."

"Listen," said Kathleen, simply. "My father left me a large income quite independent of Sir Fabian. The night before I came away from Magdalen I made my will," here her eyes met Miss Brooks with a bright smile, "and I left all I had to you; so, Susy, if you will only accept the legacy and let me live with you we shall both be quite rich."

Miss Brooks shook her head.

"I couldn't touch a penny of it, Katy. I should feel like a swindler."

"Then I will touch it," she said, brightly, "and we will go shares."

"Aunt Susan, you have been talking a whole hour," came reproachfully in Emma's voice. "Do come to supper!"

The inquest was over, the funeral was fixed for Thursday. Poor Miss Brooks felt like an arch deceiver. Never before in her life had she been in such a state of bewilderment. If she exposed Kathleen's identity that young lady threatened to run away and starve in a London

lodging, and the exposure would then bring good to no one, but inflict a heavy loss on Sir Fabian Lisle and much humiliation on Emma, besides blighting Kathleen's future.

After a weary time of debate Miss Brooks gave her promise to her ex-pupil not to betray her; but she warned Katy she was no actress, and that it would be useless to count on her assistance.

"I only want you to keep silence. If Mr. Pemberton comes Miss Emma shall see him. Anyone else I can interview myself."

But Mr. Pemberton did not come. The very day of his return from Magdadorf he was seized with his old enemy the gout. When Sir Fabian, almost distracted by the different communications which reached him at Magdadorf, rushed to London and saw the lawyer, he found him a helpless prisoner unable to move one foot.

"It is quite true," he said, gravely, when he had listened to Fabian's stormy questions. "If the poor child had lived you must have married her or given up all hope of Lisle for your own lifetime; but from the school-mistress's telegrams it seems she was killed in the accident. I'm sure I'm very sorry. You see, Sir Fabian, I knew the girl and pitied her. Of course, it's a wonderful escape for you, but I can't help feeling for her."

Sir Fabian waxed indignant.

"Surely you don't think me base enough to wish you to do otherwise! Heaven knows I would rather have renounced all hope of my inheritance than have purchased it at such a cost."

"Still the fact remains. Kathleen is dead, and you are free. Poor child! she must have had some presentiment of evil. She actually made her will and left the whole of her fortune to her old governess. The will is not worth the paper it is written on, as there are no witnesses, and the property reverts to you by Sir Jocelyn's arrangement if she died intestate."

"As if I should take it."

"You can think about that later. Meanwhile, one of us ought to go to Clifton. It is simply impossible for me, gladly as I would pay the last tribute of respect to Sir Jocelyn's child; but it would be a kindly act of you if you attended the funeral."

Sir Fabian reached Clifton late on Wednesday, and went at once to Paragon House.

Miss Brooks was sitting in her own sanctum with her niece and Kathleen when his card was brought to her.

"My dear, I can't see him," said the principal, trembling like an aspen-leaf. "Emma, you must go and talk to him, for I can't."

Emma was good nature itself, but yet she hesitated.

"Won't it seem strange, aunt?"

"Shall I go with you?" suggested Kathleen.

"You know it was you and I who saw her; and I suppose I was the last person who spoke to her. So we could tell Sir Fabian all we know of his cousin, and it might spare your aunt."

The drawing-room at Paragon House was about as unlike your preconceived ideas of a school drawing-room as well could be. A long, low apartment with many windows, a delicate paper on the walls, pretty, modern furniture, and plenty of sweet smelling flowers.

Sir Fabian felt a strange sense of restfulness as he took a seat near the centre table and awaited Miss Brooks's coming. To his surprise there entered, not a middle-aged lady, but two girls; one staid, sensible and calm, just what an embryo schoolmistress would be; the other fair, refined and graceful, with a sad, wistful face, and a beauty the more striking for the extreme plainness of her black dress. The last rays of the setting sun rested lovingly on her hair, turning it to masses of gold as she came quietly forward at her companion's side.

"My aunt is sorry not to come to you herself," said Emma, gravely; "but your cousin's death has been such a sudden and terrible shock to her, she shrinks from the interview. She was away from home, besides, at the time of the accident. It was I who went to the scene of the disaster

and first saw the poor girl, and this young lady was a passenger by the same train, and travelled in the same carriage as your cousin from Exeter, so that it seemed to us we could give you as much information as my aunt."

Fabian bowed.

"I should be sorry to trouble Miss Brooks against her wishes. I can hardly tell you the amazement the telegrams caused me. I seemed to hear that I had had a cousin, and to lose her in the same breath!"

"She was not your cousin, really," said Kathleen, suddenly.

"She was my uncle's daughter. If he had given me the chance I would gladly have been a brother to her; as it is, poor fellow, his will seemed actuated by but one motive—to make us hate each other as much as possible!"

"We heard she was perhaps to have been your wife," said Emma Brooks, simply. "It must make her sudden death very painful to you just because you may have felt her a stumbling-block in your path."

"You have expressed my very thoughts," said the young man, quietly. "I would give my whole fortune—I would renounce every claim of ever being Lisle of Lisle—if only it would restore poor Kathleen to life!"

"She is better off," said the girl whose face had so captivated him. "This world is full of sorrow, and Kathleen is at peace for ever! I thought she had the saddest face I ever saw, and my whole heart went out to her, though we were only together a few minutes!"

"And my aunt, who knew her from a child, says the same," added Emma. "She has often told me Kathleen was almost too sweet and true for this world! Perhaps, Sir Fabian, Heaven has been kind in taking her. She had lost her father who idolised her; she had no near relatives. Had she lived it seems to me her lot would have been a very lonely one!"

"There is one message I wished to send to your aunt," said Fabian, kindly. "My cousin's will, though not legally executed, will be binding on me, and Miss Brooks shall receive her legacy as promptly as though the will had been drawn by the ablest lawyer of the day!"

"I am sure Miss Brooks will not take it if there is any flaw in the will," replied Kathleen, before Emma could say simply,—

"Aunt Susan had quite made up her mind in any case to refuse the legacy; she felt she had no manner of claim to it. Sir Jocelyn had been a liberal, generous friend to her, and she could not bear to profit by his child's death. I think it will be a positive relief to her if there is a flaw in the will."

"But surely the wishes of the dead should be respected?"

"These can hardly be regarded as the girl's real wishes. She must have made that will very hurriedly, without a moment's thought of anyone but her old friend!"

"Your aunt is very disinterested."

He tried again to shake their purpose, but it was in vain. A message to Miss Brooks brought the principal herself. Fabian thought he had never seen anyone so upset by the death of a girl in nowise related to them. She thanked him for his generous intentions, but would not consent to accept anything.

Sir Fabian rose to go, with a strange feeling that the wife his uncle would fain have chosen for him must have had something very lovable about her since this old spinster, after three years of separation, cherished her memory so fondly.

The next day there was a new-made grave in Clifton churchyard, and a simple funeral, at which Lisle of Lisle was chief mourner. Soon after the mournful ceremony the Baronet went back to London, little guessing that the girl whose sweet face had been the first to touch his heart since his old love's perfidy, six years ago, lay even then in her little white bed at Paragon House tossing restlessly, in all the wild delirium of fever, while Dr. Gale told Miss Brooks plainly he feared her *protégée* was threatened with a serious illness.

CHAPTER IV.

THE months had rolled on since Sir Fabian attended that simple funeral. A marble cross, with the one word "Kathleen," now marked the fresh-made grave in Clifton churchyard, and the new Baronet was getting used to his honours.

For more than four months he had been Lisle of Lisle, a wealthy baronet, but most of the time had been spent out of England. He had carried out the project formed before his uncle's death, and passed the autumn at Rome in hard work. The picture which was to make his name was far advanced, when, in the beginning of December, he received an urgent invitation from his friend, Lord Lascelles, to Lascelles Castle for Christmas.

Fabian had a warm regard for the young noble and his wife. Perhaps he longed for English faces, and was tired of an Italian winter; for he wrote a prompt acceptance, packed up the wonderful picture, and set out for the little house at Brompton we have already visited, meaning to spend a few days there, and then go on to his friend's.

The picture was a well-known subject—King Cophetua and the beggar-maid—and it was already well advanced. Fabian hoped to send it into the next year's Academy, but, as yet, he had found no face which seemed to him a model worthy of the beggar-maid.

In vain he had gazed at the beauties of Rome—in vain he had taxed his own imagination. To his fancy there ever recurred the girl he had seen in the drawing-room at Clifton, Miss Brooks's junior teacher.

He had never seen her but that once. He had heard nothing of her since. He did not even know her name, and yet he was bent on painting her face. If no other model could be found he must even do the best he could from memory.

"And she spends her life in teaching a pack of unruly children," he muttered to himself, "when she is lovelier than half the professional beauties of London. I wonder what her history is! She has a history, unless I am very much mistaken!"

Lord Lascelles drove to meet his friend, and greeted Fabian with friendly warmth, but the impetuous young noble seemed so manifestly ill, at ease that Fabian decided something must be the matter.

"What's wrong, Lal?" he asked, cheerfully. "You never could keep a secret. Has your favourite hunter fallen lame, or is Lady Lascelles going to get up more charades?"

"Ah! you remember how I suffered at the last! It's nothing of that sort, Fabian. Only something has happened I'm afraid you won't like, and I don't see how I can put a stop to it!"

"If I am the only sufferer hadn't you better reveal the extent of the misfortune at once?" said Fabian, cheerfully. "I assure you I feel equal to a good deal!"

"We never invited her!" said poor Lord Lascelles, almost piteously. "We neither of us like her well enough, even if you had not been coming, but she wrote this morning and offered to spend Christmas with us; and, while Dolly and I were cogitating how we could refuse civilly, she actually arrived—said we ought to have had the letter yesterday."

"You haven't told me the intruder's name yet, Lal!"

"I thought you would have guessed—Mrs. Carteret."

"Well," said Fabian, laughing, "you see I am overwhelmed by the calamity! I really think, Lal, I could pay a heavier price than putting up with her society for the enjoyment of spending Christmas with you."

Lord Lascelles wrung his hand. "That is good of you, Fabian. You see she is Dolly's own cousin (though they are as different as light from darkness), and I couldn't send her away when she had once come."

"Of course not."

"Dolly is terribly put out about it."

"Tell her not to trouble, I haven't. I suppose the amiable Carteret has come too!"

Lord Lascelles stated.
 "Fabian, where have you lived? He's been dead more than a year!"
 "Oh!"

The stress on that simple word, the peculiar whistle that accompanied it, spoke volumes.

"Yes," replied the young lord, as though Fabian had asked him a question. "We understood it at once; she is left very badly off, and is by no means an inconsolable widow."

"And she expects to find a second partner among your guests, Lal!"

"Dolly says she shall never forgive herself if you fall into that snare a second time! Really, Fabian, I do believe that woman is utterly heartless! Poor Carteret worshipped her, and yet she was never decently civil to him after he failed."

"When was that?"

"A few weeks before he died. He had insured his life for two thousand pounds, and she has that; the creditors couldn't touch it. Of course she couldn't live on the interest, but the principal may serve to carry on the campaign with."

He paused and looked at Fabian meaningly.

"It will have to carry it on until the reign of my successor, if it is to last until she becomes Lady Lisle!"

Lady Lascelles was standing in the hall to meet them, and her husband gave her an expressive glance as he whispered,—
 "It's all right."

A very pretty creature was Fabian's hostess—one of those women who have so much sunshine in their nature that after illuminating their own homes they seem positively to overflow and brighten up all with whom they come in contact—and welcomed Fabian very prettily, and led the way to her boudoir, where afternoon tea stood waiting.

"Blanche is deep in toilet mysteries," she said with a smile. "She has not yet favoured Katy and me much with her society."

"And how is Dot?" demanded Sir Fabian. "I have not seen her since she did me the honour to be my partner at that famous fancy ball."

"Dot is growing old," said Lady Lascelles, with assumed gravity. "With three younger sisters it is time she did. We have started a governess since you were here last."

"A governess for that mite! What cruelty!"

"A regular Minerva in spectacles and cap!" went on Lady Lascelles, demurely, "who rules us all with a rod of iron, and scares the children into obedience! Don't you long for an introduction?"

"I should like to rescue the little martyr," was the prompt reply, as they reached the boudoir.

"Katy," said Lady Lascelles, to a small-faced girl who sat by the fire with one smaller child on her lap and another at her feet, "here's Sir Fabian denouncing me as a cruel mother for entrusting my children to a learned lady. Let me introduce you in due form. Miss Browne—Sir Fabian Lisle. Why, Katy, what is the matter?"

Time seemed to roll back for Fabian to the night of his visit to Clifton. He had recognised Katy at once; she was the girl who had been with his destined bride at the time of her death; she whose face he had longed to paint for his picture. She grew very pale, then she said, simply,—

"I have met Sir Fabian before," and with a child in either hand left the room.

Fabian explained that former meeting.

"I don't wonder she is scared at the sight of me, poor child. Of course I remind her of the accident. Is she staying with you?"

"She is Dot's governess."

"She?"

"Did you really believe what I told you? Oh, Fabian, as though I could give the children up to a woman like that, or as if Lal and I could bear such a creature! Katy is a dear little thing. She was a teacher in a school at Clifton; but the place didn't suit her, and the principal, who was once my governess, asked me to have her. When I had once seen her I was delighted."

"She is a dear little thing!" chimed in Lord Lascelles, "and the babies idolise her. She is frightened to death at strangers; but when we

are alone Dolly makes quite a younger sister of her."

"I can't help it!" said Lady Lascelles. "Blanche has been lecturing me already about not keeping her in her proper place; but she is a dear little thing, and I am very fond of her."

Fabian did not wonder.

It was strange that in all the years that had passed since she jilted him, Fabian and his first love had never met; but the old wound was healed now. Our hero was not a man to go on caring for a woman who had deceived him. For many a year Blanche Delamere's perfidy had steeled his heart against all her sex; but never, from the moment he heard of her treachery, had he envied Mr. Carteret.

As he dressed for dinner his thoughts ran not on the coming meeting with Blanche, nor on the fact that she was a widow; but on the marvellous chance which had brought him and his ideal "beggar-maid" to be fellow-guests at the same house.

"Dolly is sure to be kind to her," thought Sir Fabian, who had almost a brother's affection for his pretty hostess; "but I hate to think of her being a governess. She is such a fragile, delicate child—she seems made for nothing but love and cherishing."

He went to the drawing-room five minutes before eight. A radiant vision glided forward.

"Have you quite forgotten me, Sir Fabian?"

She looked like anything rather than a recent widow with a very scanty income. Her languishing brown eyes were raised to Fabian's with the very expression he had once found so fascinating; but the Baronet only said, quietly,—

"I remember you perfectly, Mrs. Carteret. The Lises are not good at forgetting!"

A week passed, and not one of the guests at the Castle could be blind to the little drama enacted under their eyes. The widow courted Sir Fabian assiduously. Every one in the house could see she meant to be Lady Lisle. Pretty Dorothea Lascelles blushed again and again for her cousin. She even ventured to give Blanche a strong reprimand in private, but the beauty took it most sweetly; she could not afford to quarrel with her hostess.

"Fabian and I were lovers once!" she said, wistfully. "We cannot be as strangers!"

"You are not lovers now!" said Dolly, sharply, "and the way you go on is abominable!"

Mrs. Carteret sighed.

"Of course you can be hard on me now, and I am not at liberty to explain matters—but when I am Lady Lisle—"

"You never will be!"

Mrs. Carteret flushed.

"Are you in Sir Fabian's confidence?"

"My husband is his dearest friend; and, besides, the veriest stranger could see that Sir Fabian has no eyes for you!"

"He spoke only last night of settling down at Lisle. He said he was tired of a roving life."

Christmas Eve followed close on this little episode. Coming down the grand staircase in an elaborate costume, Mrs. Carteret came upon a scene which fairly took her breath away.

The eldest child of the house, little Dot, a fairy girl of six, was standing in a large, old-fashioned window-seat playing with Sir Fabian Lisle, and beside her was that little "stuck-up minx," as the widow liked to call Miss Browne.

Kathleen looked wonderfully fair and sweet, and Mrs. Carteret hated her more than ever, as her quick eyes noted that Sir Fabian Lisle was quite aware of it.

"My mamma is the prettiest lady in all the world!" said Dot, proudly; "and Katy is the next prettiest; don't you think so, Sir Fabian?"

Mrs. Carteret pounced on the trio before the Baronet could answer.

"That child ought to have been in bed hours ago. She will catch her death of cold standing in this draughty hall! Does Lady Lascelles know how you are neglecting her?"

Kathleen's beautiful eyes flashed for one moment with indignation, then she said calmly,—

"Lady Lascelles sent us here. Dot is going

to bed very soon; but she wanted to see the ladies go into the ball-room."

"When she goes to bed you might go into the gallery with the other servants," said Mrs. Carteret, sweetly; "you would obtain an excellent view of the ball-room."

Sir Fabian's blood boiled. He would have liked to knock the speaker down. What he did do was to turn and look at her with an indignant reproach in his dark eyes.

As for Kathleen she made no answer. One would have said she had not heard.

But later on Sir Fabian encountered Lady Lascelles, a look of unmistakable annoyance on her pretty face.

"I want you to do an errand for me, Sir Fabian."

"Gladly. What is it?"

"I had persuaded Katy to come down to-night. She knows most of the people here—and she is so fond of dancing! I left her and Dot in the Hall, and she promised to come to me as soon as the mite had gone to bed."

"Yes?"

"Well, she has not come; and I can't leave the ball-room till everyone has arrived, so I can't go and find her. I am afraid," and she lowered her voice, "Blanche may have met her, and said something unkind."

"Mrs. Carteret invited Miss Browne to view the dancing from the gallery with the other servants! I heard her."

Lady Lascelles bit her lip.

"Then I will leave the ball-room and go to her myself. Poor little thing! I feel ashamed she should have met with such treatment here!"

"Let me be your ambassador!" pleaded Sir Fabian. "Dear Lady Lascelles, I promise to bring Miss Browne to you!"

He entered the schoolroom, and at first sight thought it empty. The gas was not lighted, and only the flickering blaze of the warm fire above on the pretty room; but a half sob fell on his ear, and, looking in the direction, he saw a little heap of something black kneeling on the floor, and knew that it was Katy.

She was quite unconscious of his presence, and was sobbing bitterly.

"I ought not to have done it!" the poor girl murmured between her bursts of weeping. "No good ever comes of deception; but I was so unhappy—and I wronged no one!"

"Kathleen!"

She looked up and saw Sir Fabian. Very, very tenderly he took her hand.

"Lady Lascelles is wondering what has become of her little friend! She wants me to bring you to the ball-room."

Kathleen shook her head.

"I cannot go! Oh, I cannot!"

"Why not?"

"You heard—what Mrs. Carteret said!"

"My dear child," said Fabian, gently, "Mrs. Carteret is an angry ill-tempered woman, who talks a great deal of folly."

Kathleen looked at him reproachfully.

"You must not say so! How can you?"

"Because I think it."

"But you are going to marry her!"

"Heaven forbid!"

"She told me only yesterday that you came to the Castle on purpose to meet her, and that the wedding was to be at Easter."

"And what did you think of the arrangement?"

"I hoped you would be happy."

"I should be pretty wretched if it were true; but I have never thought of marrying Mrs. Carteret! She was my first love, and when she jilted me I felt it keenly. But there has never been an hour in all the years since then when I have envied her husband!"

A long, long pause.

"You are losing all the dancing, Sir Fabian," said Kathleen at last.

"I had rather stay here."

"But—"

"But you want me to go away, is that it?"

"No."

"Kathleen, do you remember our first meeting at Paragon House?"

"Perfectly."

"I have never forgotten it. Do you know all the time I was in Italy I was haunted by your face? I longed to paint it in my picture for the Academy."

Kathleen smiled.

"Oh, no!" she cried. "I could never let my picture be exhibited—it would betray all."

Very gently Fabian held the trembling hand in his as he said,—

"So you have a secret! Do you know, Katy, I have one too. May I tell it you?"

She did not speak, and so he went on,—

"Child, do you know from the first time I saw you I have never been able to forget you! I used to think until I came to the Castle it was just your beauty that I coveted for my picture, but I know better now. I know that I love you so well I would give up wealth, title, home, just to call you mine. Be my wife, Katy, and I will guard you from all sorrow, and cherish you with my heart's best love."

"I cannot, oh! I cannot!"

"You do not love me; but, Katy, if your heart is free, love would come in time, darling! Affection like mine must win a return."

"You don't understand," she whispered. "I am not good at forgetting either, and I think I have loved you ever since I saw you; but just think of the gulf between us! I am Lady Lascelles's nursery governess, and you are Lisle of Lisle."

"What does that matter so that we love each other! Katy, if you care for me, you have no right to send me away."

"But—you don't know. I have deceived you. I have a secret."

"I always thought so," said Fabian, archly. "From the moment I saw you I decided, in my own mind, you were not really a professional governess, but some stray princess, whom unkindness or bereavement had driven out from home to seek her fortune."

"No one was ever unkind to me—it was all my own fault. They wanted me to marry someone, and so I—hid myself."

"Well, on the whole," said Fabian, fondly, "I have no right to scold you, for you see if you hadn't run away I might never have found you."

"But it was deceiving."

"I don't see it. Anyway, it was not deceiving to obtain anything for yourself. You wronged no one, unless, indeed, you left relations in uncertainty about your fate."

"Oh, no! I have not a real relation in the world. Miss Brooks is my dearest friend—and she did not blame me."

"And now, my wandering princess, your roamings must end, for I want you to come to me soon and help me to make a home of Lisle. Katy, you must tell me of whom I am to ask my wife—if you have no relations I suppose Miss Brooks is your guardian! I don't think she will be a very stern one."

"I have no guardian. I came of age last summer, just before my father died. Mr. Pemberton managed his affairs. Papa trusted him."

Sir Fabian started.

"I know Pemberton well; but, Katy, you have a secret. Do you know I think I guess it. You are, indeed, Kathleen Browne, but in the railway accident at Clifton last year you gave your identity to your ill-fated fellow-traveller. You were so bent on hiding yourself from me that you chose to let her be buried as Sir Jocelyn's daughter, and went out into the world to fight your own battles."

Kathleen trembled.

"Can you ever forgive me?"

He smiled.

"My darling, there must be no such word as forgiveness between you and me; but, Katy, only think of the hardship you might have encountered. Whatever made you do it! Don't you know that by my uncle's will an ample fortune was secured you, even if you refused to be Lady Lisle?"

She blushed crimson.

"But if I had refused to marry you, you would have lost your inheritance, and I could not bear the idea that just to save Lisle you might marry me!"

"Sweetheart, if Lisle were to be forfeited the

day after our marriage I should still desire to marry you. Katy, won't you believe me?"

Perhaps he was content with the answer written in her blue eyes, for he stooped and kissed her.

Enter Lady Lascelles.

"Sir Fabian, do you know it is nearly two hours since I sent you to find Miss Browne! What have you been about?"

"I have been discovering a relation, and planning an injury to you."

Dolly looked amazed.

"Katy, what does he mean?"

"You have been harbouring a princess in disguise," went on Fabian, with perfect gravity. "Behold in your supposed governess my uncle Sir Jocelyn's heiress!"

Lady Lascelles knew the story of Sir Jocelyn's will, and guessed that Fabian's own desires were favourable to its being fulfilled. She took Katy's hand, and smilingly returned,—

"I can tell the rest. You mean to take her away!"

Fabian smiled.

"I do; and, in the meantime, as the surest way of protecting her from Mrs. Carteret's unkindness, I want her to be introduced to your guests as the future Lady Lisle!"

So Mr. Pemberton had his wish, and drew Kathleen's marriage settlements after all. And in after time, when Lisle was the pleasantest home in the county, and Lady Lisle the favourite hostess for miles round, people always laughed at the bare idea Sir Fabian married her to secure his inheritance. They always said it must have been a perfect love match, for all could see that the most precious gift in all the world to the Baronet was his winsome wife.

"The fact is," said Lady Lascelles, who, as an old friend of the Lisles, was sometimes assailed with questions, "he fell in love with her, and she with him before he ever suspected all he would gain by winning her."

[THE END.]

SOME ten years ago a French missionary started the systematic rearing of two kinds of spiders for their web, and the Board of Trade Journal states that a spider web factory is now in successful operation of Chalala-Mendon, near Paris, where ropes are made of spider web intended for balloons for French military aeronautic section. The spiders are arranged in groups of twelve above a reel, upon which the threads are wound. It is by no means easy work for the spiders, for they are not released until they have furnished from thirty to forty yards of thread each. The web is washed and thus freed of the outer reddish and sticky cover. Eight of the washed threads are then taken together, and of this rather strong yarn cords are woven, which are stronger and much lighter than cords of silk of the same thickness.

THE so-called rubber tree, with its thick, glossy, green leaves, common in hot-houses and gardens, is that which produces the gutta percha. It is nothing like the great tree from which comes the best rubber of commerce. The real rubber tree is not unlike other forest trees. It looks much like the ash, and it grows to a height of more than sixty feet. Its bark is silvery gray, where it has not become black by tapping. The trunk of the tree is about as big as a man's waist. Where it has been tapped, it often swells out at the base, so that it is much larger. It blossoms in August, being then covered with little white flowers. It is a nut tree, and in December and January, when the nuts are ripe, the shells which contain them burst with a noise like a fire-cracker, throwing the nuts to some distance. There are so many nuts on each tree that a man could easily gather enough in a day to plant one hundred acres of land. The trees can be easily grown in the right soil, and they thrive without cultivation. But to yield rubber they must be fifteen years old. Fifteen years is too long a time for a man to wait on the Amazon, and at present the trees which produce rubber are wild.

THERE are four or five kinds of house flies. The most common known to entomologists is the "musca domestica," a medium-size grayish fly with its mouth spread out for sucking up liquid substances. It cannot bite. There is another fly called the "stomoxys calcitrans," which resembles it closely, but differs in having an important appendage that is built to pierce the skin. It is second in abundance. Both of these flies are chiefly bred in manure. In our experience and those of other entomologists, it has been discovered that they will seldom lay their eggs in anything else. There are several other kinds of flies, but these two are the most common, and to them we owe the nuisance that housewives suffer. The eggs are hatched into larvae within twenty-four hours after they are laid. They remain in the larval state from five to seven days, and in the pupal state a similar time. The average life of a fly is from ten to fourteen days.

ALTHOUGH porcelain was known to both the Chinese and Japanese for ages, it was not introduced into Europe until the beginning of the eighteenth century, when John Bottcher, a native of Solihull, in Voighland, was the first to make it. This man was apprenticed to a Berlin apothecary named Zorn, in whose shop he conferred some favour upon a professional alchemist, who in return promised to teach him the art of transforming the base metals into gold. Bottcher, after studying under his new master for a time, imagined that his fortune was made, and in 1700 he ran away. He was pursued, but found protection among friends, who demanded to witness an exhibition of his pretended skill, and the poor fellow was eventually compelled to acknowledge that he had been imposed upon. But he persevered in his labours, and on one occasion, having made a mixture of various finely organised earths for the purpose of making strong crucibles, he discovered, after he had taken the compound mass from the oven, that he had gained a kind of pottery more beautiful than he had ever seen.

As the well-educated native of India emulates Western manners as far as possible, it is not to be wondered at that he is partial to the frock coat. From this partiality a curious trade has sprung up. Regularly large consignments of second-hand frock coats are shipped out from England to Calcutta and Bombay, and are disposed of to the natives, who strut about like peacocks in a not infrequently impossible coat. Add to this that the wearers don't go in for socks, and, to a man, wear glaring patent leather shoes, and you have a picture. When is added to this fact that the native head-dress is worn, and that the unmentionables are of linen, and cut skin-tight with many folds around the ankles, the sight is oftentimes ludicrous. So fashionable has the frock coat become in India that native tailors make the ordinary coats of the native largely on frock coat lines, and it is no unusual sight to see the athletic youths of Northern India sporting themselves in so-called frock coats of as many hues as the famous garment of Joseph.

If two pieces of looking-glass are held on the opposite sides of a lighted lamp or candle, an endless series of bright flames may be seen at one time. So, in the cold north, when the air is full of minute floating ice-disks, the sun with its halo is reflected many times, and the traveller sees two, four, or more mock suns with crowing halos of startling patterns. In hilly countries where the sun rises in a serene atmosphere, but opposite to a thin vaporous cloud, if a human being stand on a high hill between them, a wonderful image is seen on the cloud-curtain, moving as the man moves, at one moment clear and the next fading away. This is a kind of natural magic-lantern, where the cloud takes the place of the white screen, and a man, or man, of the alpine. The high-set peak of the Hart's mountain, called the Brocken, is the place where this is clearest seen, so the image is called the spectre of the Brocken. But mountaineers see it often on the high Alps. The changing rays of the morning sun make the giant shadows vanish and reappear, and the moving cloud-screen gives them motion.

THE MYSTERY OF ALANDIKE

—10:—
PROLOGUE.

In all the wide county of Yorkshire it would have been hard to find a fairer estate than Alandyke, which for centuries had been in the possession of the Leighs. The beautiful old mansion stood in a well-wooded park; from the many windows were picturesque views of the Yorkshire moors; the turf was smooth as velvet, the trees were of splendid growth; everything nature and art could furnish adorned Alandyke, and yet a shadow rested over the place—the gossip whispered darkly that a curse was on it.

Yet Sir Jocelyn Leigh had never wronged a creature on his estate; no one could have laid an act of cruelty to his charge. He was not a popular man; he was a "Southerner" as the country folk denominated all who came from the region beyond their own North Country, and he had taken the place of the heir of Alandyke, who had been the idol of his father's tenantry—there was the beginning and end of his offence.

At this time the Baronet was a grave, stern-faced man, not very far from forty. He was the last of his line; his wife slept in the village churchyard; there were only two little girls in the stately nursery, yet he showed no inclination to seek another helpmeet. He moved freely in all the society of the county; his sister filled his house with guests. Now and again it was rumoured this or that high-born maiden or graceful widow was to be Lady Leigh, but the time passed on until five winters' snows had covered his wife's grave, and yet he had asked no other woman to fill her place.

Sir Jocelyn had a reason for thus disappointing the hopes of manoeuvring mothers. He carried with him night and day a secret he had never disclosed to any living creature, and which was already lining his face with furrows and sowing threads of silver among his black hair. The master of Alandyke had a hidden care, a skeleton in his closet invisible to all others, and yet ever present with him. He will reveal it himself in this story.

Three scenes of his life were ever returning to his mind. The first, he remembered himself a boy at Eton—a boy with not too much pocket-money or too many friends—summoned to the presence of a grave old man with a face of great resolution and an expression of indomitable pride.

"So you are Jocelyn's boy—will you be my son?"

He had looked up at his questioner as though to ask if he had heard aright. He knew his kinsman had a son of his own, a pleasant, gallant officer, whom, boy-like, he had ardently admired. There was no change in Sir Kenneth's face as he repeated his question.

"It rests with you, Jocelyn, to be my heir, the prop and stay of my old age."

The youth had consented; from that day his position changed. He knew the sweets of wealth; instinctively others taught him his new advantages; he was treated as a rich man's heir and the only penalty he had to pay for it was a two months' Continental tour with his cousin every autumn. That went on until he was twenty-one, when, for the first time, Sir Kenneth took him to Alandyke. And the second scene was there.

A splendid entertainment was held in honour of his coming of age. The noblest names for miles round were on Sir Kenneth's visiting list, but young Jocelyn knew instinctively the guests bidden to his honour had little good-feeling for him. There was a coldness in their faces, a reserve in their greeting which cut him to the heart.

It was winter, the snow lay on the ground in thick, white masses. At midnight a strange stir arose among the guests; one whispered to the other, then General Broadbalt himself accosted Sir Kenneth.

"There has been an accident! A poor man has lost his footing in the snow. My coachman found him, and has brought him here."

"Quite right, quite right! I hope the doctor has been sent for."

Still there was that undefined murmur, and at last one bolder than the others turned to the Baronet.

"You will not refuse to see him? He is asking for you."

Sir Kenneth yielded, little suspecting what his friends knew so well. He crossed the ballroom to the hall, and followed the housekeeper to the room where the rescued man had been carried.

He was too late. As he reached the bed there was a slight movement, a gasp for breath, a murmured exclamation of "My father!" and then all was over.

It was even so. Hungry, poverty-stricken, footsore, the true heir had returned like a prodigal to his home to find it full of rejoicings in honour of him who had usurped his place. Weary and weak from illness he had lost his footing, and, but for the discovery of the General's coachman, might not even have died in his own home.

What had he come for? What had reduced him to sue to the father who had cast him off?

No one ever knew. Sir Kenneth showed no sign of emotion. At young Jocelyn's earnest request he allowed the guests to be dismissed, but he refused to tell his heir the reason he had parted with his son—his only son. He refused to hazard any conjecture as to the young man's return after those seven years of weary exile.

Jocelyn never forgot that scene. He followed his luckless kinsman to the grave with a sore heart. His was a generous nature, and he pitied the exiled son truly; but he was sad also for himself, for he knew perfectly well that in the eyes of all his neighbours he was nothing better than a heartless usurper.

After that Alandyke was closed. Sir Kenneth and his heir travelled incessantly for three years; but the Baronet aged rapidly, and he begged of Jocelyn to marry, that he might see his children before he died. Mr. Leigh was nothing loth. He chose the penniless daughter of an English earl, who had nothing in the world but a long pedigree and brilliant beauty to recommend her.

Sir Kenneth was delighted; it was a union after his own heart. The family went home to Alandyke, and for a time all seemed to prosper with them.

But soon after his first child was born Mr. Leigh went abroad for a short tour, and in his absence his benefactor died, tenderly watched over and cheered by the Lady Alberta. When Jocelyn came home to resume his honours, he thought a strange change had come to his wife. She was restless and nervous, she seemed to start at every sound, and to dread the sight of strangers. She had been a beauty; she sank into a sorrowful, fretful invalid. Jocelyn humoured her in all things; he had long found out his marriage was a mistake, and that the Lady Alberta could contribute little to his happiness; but he bore with her patiently. He waited on her until he almost fancied he cared for her, and that the light of his life was going out when the doctors told him he must lose her.

And now comes the last of the three scenes which haunted our Baronet.

It was five years after Sir Kenneth's death, a mild, unhealthy winter, when there was much sickness in the neighbourhood. Many children died of low fever, and among them the only boy who had been given to Sir Jocelyn and his wife. That loss was Lady Alberta's death-blow; she had been an invalid for years. When her boy's funeral was over it was evident to all she was dying.

"It was for his sake I did it!" she would moan in her delirium to her husband, "it was for his sake, and Heaven has killed him to punish me; Jocelyn, don't you understand! I am your child's murderer, why don't you give me up to justice and have me hung?"

"My poor girl!" and her husband's arms were round her as tenderly as if she had been his life's love, "you are talking wildly; nothing in this world killed our boy. God wanted him and took him to Himself."

Lady Alberta shivered.

"But I did it, Jocelyn! You were away;

there was no one knew it but me. The temptation was so terrible. I had felt poverty before I married you and I dreaded it. Besides, there was Harold, my darling, my bonny boy!"

And when at last her husband gleaned the truth of these wild ravings, when he learned what she had done, the iron entered into his soul. People often said Sir Jocelyn never looked the same after his wife's death. They little suspected the awful legacy of shame and trouble she had left behind her. It was not grief for his wife and little son that lined the Baronet's face, and sewed silver threads among his hair; it was shame, bitter humiliating shame, for wrong done in his name he was powerless to right. He was by nature true of heart, honourable, upright. It seemed to him after listening to the Lady Alberta's ravings that he could never again lift up his head, or face the presence of his fellow-men, and it was his wife who had brought upon him this fearful dishonour—his wife, whose truth he had never doubted, who was a daughter of one of England's noblest families!

CHAPTER I.

Who among the dwellers in suburban London south of the River Thames does not know Camberwell—Camberwell, with its numberless streets, its houses of every size and grade, from the noble mansions of Herts-hill to the narrow, winding labyrinthine round the canal?

Somewhere in this bustling suburb there stood at the time of this story, and probably stands now, a narrow road which leads nowhere, whose termination is a high brick wall, and which consists of half-a-dozen semi-detached houses, jostling from the name of their builder in the unromantic title of Bilby-road.

Bilby-road thoroughly deserves its name, in that there is nothing romantic about it. No picturesque poverty, no love in a cottage, seeks a refuge in Bilby-road. The six houses are invariably inhabited by men who are "something in the City," and whose bustling wives let off a few rooms, varying from one to three, to persons usually of better birth and smaller means than themselves.

The parlours of No. 6 were inhabited by a widow lady and her two daughters; and one snowy December afternoon the girls sat in the front room very near the apology for a fire, eagerly discussing ways and means. The elder could not have been twenty, the younger was perhaps sixteen. It was easy to see from their dress that both knew the stings of poverty, and yet the harshest critic could not have applied the words plain or uninteresting to either of them. There was little resemblance between them. One was a pretty child, careless, impulsive, wifal; the other, despite her youth, a woman, with a woman's love and a woman's power of suffering.

"It's no use, Nell," and the younger girl laid her head half wearily on her sister's lap. "I'm tired to death of everything. How can anyone be cheerful when they're as poor as we are, when every day things seem getting worse and worse? I declare I wish something would happen; I shouldn't much care what."

Nell, otherwise Helena Stuart, listened in perfect silence to this outburst; when it was over she put one hand caressingly on the bowed head.

"If only papa had lived, Ee, things would have been so different."

"But he didn't," remarked Ee, who was very practical. "He died when you were four years old, before I can remember," with a little sigh, "and we have lived here half my life, till it really seems to me we shall never live anywhere else."

"Patience, little one."

"It's all very well for you," retorted Ee. "You are hardly ever at home; you are always in other people's houses giving music lessons."

"It isn't very pleasant work sometimes, Ee."

"At any rate, it must be better than staying at home and listening to mamma's lamentations. I'm sure, Nell, she makes me almost count the bits of coal I put on the fire, and she tells me nineteen times a day she hopes I shall never

marry a gentleman, as if I should ever marry anyone at all shut up here."

A brilliant blush dyed Nella's pale cheeks. For one moment she was silent, then she said, slowly,—

"How would you like to take my place, Bee, after Christmas?"

"Your place?" gasped the child. "What do you mean, Nell? People wouldn't have me."

"I think they would. You are very clever, Bee, and you look older than your age. Oh, yes, I don't think there would be any difficulty."

"But you?" asked Bee, struck with remorse at her own selfishness. Somehow she could not fancy Nell humouring their mother's follies, and fighting pitched battles with the landlady, as was her daily portion.

"I—Oh, I should go away."

"Go away! You couldn't and leave me behind. Why, Nell, I'd rather be poor all my days than lose you."

"It would only be for a little time," said the other girl, in a sort of choked voice; "all would come right in time. Oh! Bee, I can't explain any more now, you must trust me."

Beatrice looked troubled.

"I always trust you," she said, simply.

"But oh, Nell, you have grown terribly mysterious lately"—then as her sister started up—"you are never going out! It is past five o'clock; you can't have any lessons to give now."

"No, but I must go. Give mother her tea, and don't wait for me; I may be late."

She went into the next room and put on her outdoor clothes. True, the hat was plain and unfashionable; the cloth jacket had seen good service, and yet Nell looked a lady—she could have looked nothing else.

She had not the beauty of her younger sister, but her face had a charm all its own; her hair was of that strange uncommon tint which people never can describe and call indifferently Auburn, and copper-coloured. She had large, lustrous, grey eyes, a fair, creamy complexion, regular features, and a sylph-like figure. She was only a music teacher. Her employers thought her instructions well repaid at two shillings an hour, and yet there was a nameless something in her manner better suited to a lady of high degree than to the needy lodger in the parlours of No. 6, Bilby Road, Camberwell.

The church clock was striking six as she passed out into the darkness of the December night. She carried no roll of music, no insignia of her calling. She walked on with a set, steady pace, as one certain of her purpose. On and on she walked with a strange hope at her heart, conquering fatigue and cold until she reached a bustling railway station, more than a mile from Bilby Road. She went into the waiting-room, and stood warming her poor numbed hands before the cheerful fire.

She had no time for doubts, no aching suspense to bear. She had not been there a moment when a hand was laid upon her shoulder, and the voice dearest to her on earth replied,—

"I thought you would not fall me; but what a night it is, my darling! You must be half frozen."

"It was very cold, but I did not mind," her face almost radiant as she looked at him. "I knew you would be here; and, oh! Guy, I have wanted you so badly."

The waiting-room was empty; it was on the main-line platform, and but few trains stopped at that time of the evening. People often wondered what the use of a waiting-room was at that particular spot, but Helena Stuart and Guy Vernon regarded it as a peculiar blessing to themselves.

It was the old, old story. He was rich and she was poor. He had met her on one memorable evening at a friend's, whose sister was one of her pupils. He had loved her at first sight, and being one who rarely denies himself anything he longed for, he had spent many hours with her since, and employed them in teaching her how to love him. Knowing that it was well-nigh impossible he should ever marry her, he had deliberately set himself to win the treasure of her

love—he thought nothing of the heartache that must be his after portion.

And things had been going on thus for six months. It had been summer when they met; it was winter now, and in that half-year Nell had learnt to hold Guy Vernon dearer than aught on earth. She had met him often, and no one knew it; he filled her thoughts waking and sleeping, yet she had never breathed his name to mother or sister.

"You are trembling," he said, fondly, as he put her on a seat and placed himself at her side.

"Little Nell, what troubles you?"

For an answer she burst into tears. Mr. Vernon looked annoyed; he had a very troublesome communication to make to her that evening, and tears were hardly a suitable introduction.

"What is it, Nell?"

"I don't know," sobbed the girl; "only I am so weary of all this deceit. Guy, shall I never see you openly as other girls see their lovers? Must we always go on plotting and scheming just for a few moments together?"

Guy Vernon did not answer her. He was a strikingly handsome man of five or six and twenty with dark, expressive blue eyes, and clearly cut aristocratic features, but his mouth was weak and a little cruel, his blue eyes had a strange wavering gaze.

"Don't be unreasonable," he said, a little sharply. "You know if I were my own master there should be an end to this secrecy to-morrow. I would marry you openly in the light of day, but now I dare not offend my father. I am utterly at his mercy; he could cut me off with a shilling if he liked."

"But how is it to end?" asked the girl, hopelessly. "Guy, I can't go on long like this; the suspense, the dreadful uncertainty, is killing me."

"I love you, Nell," he said, quickly. "I love you more than anyone in the world."

She looked into his eyes with a great tenderness in her own, as she answered,—

"And I love you better than life."

"Then why seek to change things? We can meet pretty often; no one is the wiser. We don't want any outsiders to share our happiness."

"You don't understand," her voice was full of pain. "I can't go on like this—I can't."

"Why not?"

"Don't you see my life is an acted lie. My mother and Bee think I have extra pupils. They pity me for being overworked. They have no idea that—"

"What does it matter?" he interrupted her. "Let them think what they like, so that they don't suspect the real thing."

She started.

"But it is not true."

"You harp too much on truth, little Nell."

"It's the one thing worth having."

"Is it? What about love? I used to think you deemed my love worth having."

His arm was round her, her head rested on his shoulder, and again and again he pressed his lips to hers.

"I wish I was a rich man, Nell, we would be married to-morrow."

His private income was six hundred a-year. It had come to him by his mother, and nothing could rob him of it. The half would have been riches to Nell, but she could not say so.

"I wanted to tell you," she said, gently freeing herself from his embrace; "things can't go on like this, you must let me tell them."

"Whom?"

"My mother and Bee."

"As well put it in the newspapers."

"They would keep the secret. Oh, Guy, I can't go on as I am, it hurts me so. I never had a secret before in my life. You must let me tell them."

"And if I refuse?"

After all, she was very proud. She might be poor, and told hard for daily bread, but she was as sensitive and refined as any high-bred lady, and she had come out this night, resolved that, one way or another, the miserable entanglement she had been led into must cease—either her engagement must be announced, or she would give up the love she had found so sweet.

"And if I refuse?"

She never hesitated.

"Then everything must be over between us."

"Nell!"

"Yes," she said, hoarsely; "I cannot bear this any longer. I love you, Guy. It will break my heart, I think, to lose you, but I cannot continue this terrible deception. It seems to me I am always acting falsehoods."

Guy Vernon looked at her strangely.

"I thought you loved me!"

"I do love you, Heaven only knows how much."

"Yet you cast me off!"

"Not willingly. Oh, Guy, let me tell my mother; our secret will be safe with her. Your father need never hear it."

But he was thoroughly angry.

"No, I will choose my own time. If you do not love me well enough to wait, the responsibility of our rupture rests with you."

She took out of her pocket a little leather case filled with letters, a photograph, and a gold watch-ring. She placed them silently on the table; then before Guy had understood her purpose she left the room.

He was sorry then. He loved her as much as it was in his nature to love anyone, but his father's estates were heavily mortgaged, and he had been brought up to the understanding that he must marry an heiress. The heiress was even now awaiting him at Vernon Grange, and he had come out to-night with the full intention of breaking off with Nell; but, somehow, now that the girl had taken the law into her own hands, he regretted it. How lovely she looked as she turned away from him! After all, no other woman would ever love him as she had done. An instinct told him he had cast aside the happiness of his life.

"If she had only been a little richer," he muttered, "or her family more presentable; but what would the governor have said? I suppose I'm well out of it, and yet, hang it, I feel as if I'd lost something I shall never find again. Oh, Nell, why did we ever meet if things were to go on like this?"

He quite forgot that it was by his own device they had so gone. He quite forgot how he had waylaid Miss Stuart all through the long summer evenings; how he had devoted time and trouble to the one object of teaching her to love him. Was it her fault, poor girl, if she had learned the lesson too well?

Guy Vernon lingered over the waiting-room fire for more than half-an-hour. He had a strange, dim fancy Nell might yet return to him. At last the clock chimed nine—he knew then that it was useless. A page in his life's story had closed for ever. He swept the letters and ring into his pocket, then he left the room slowly and lingeringly, as one leaves the grave of some loved friend. All that was best and noblest in Guy's nature died out that night.

Nell walked on with a kind of dull leaden sensation at her heart. She seemed to have lost all sense of pain or anguish; she was only conscious of a heavy oppressive feeling almost as though a stone had been given her instead of that useful organ generally supposed to reside in a woman's left side.

"He never loved me," thought the poor girl to herself, "and, oh! I would have died for him. Guy, how could you do it? You won my heart for the plaything of an hour. Oh, it was cruel, cruel!"

She could not go home; the one thing she could not do was to face her mother's lamentations over her strange ways (so Mrs. Stuart always denoted her elder daughter's habits) and Bee's anxious efforts to keep the peace. No, clearly home was no place for her; she could not go on living day after day in those narrow rooms and keep her secret. It would drive her mad to see constantly the streets she had threaded at Guy Vernon's side. She must go away quickly—only where?

She had not spoken idly to Bee that afternoon; she really believed if she could get an appointment as resident governess Bee could replace her in the music teaching. For many reasons Nell longed to be away; her mother's tongue was sharp and cruel, and if ever an inkling of the cause of her daughter's depression came to her

she would be merciless; besides, unfortunately, there was a prosperous builder in Camberwell, the fortunate owner of the whole of Bilby-road, who had professed himself struck with Miss Stuart's attractions, and whom the widow fondly believed she could secure as a son-in-law with but little effort.

"I must go away," decided Nell, putting one hand to her head to stay its aching. "I am quite sure of that. I will tell mother to-morrow. The only question is where?"

Oh, how she longed for her father! She had been but four years old when he left them, but she remembered him perfectly. She had been his idol; even now she could recall his fondness for her and her baby sister. They had been very poor even then, and he had gone out one night without bidding them good-bye—gone to seek his fortune, he told them, smiling. That was fifteen years ago, and he had never returned. Mrs. Stuart believed him dead; little Beatrice had been brought up in the belief. Friends and acquaintances were always told the pretty, faded woman was a widow. Only the elder girl believed, yet faintly, he might return; true, she had deferred almost made her heart sick, but she had never quite given up the wonderful possibility.

She stood on the station step, wondering just a little how it was that in all that bustling world there seemed no place for her, when a lady came out, her warm fur cloak brushing against Nell's well-worn jacket.

"Why, it's Miss Stuart! What are you doing out alone at this time of night, my dear!" changing her voice as she saw the look of set misery upon the girl's white face. "Is there anything the matter?"

Nell tried to smile and answer her, but the smile was sadder far than tears, and the words were inaudible.

"I'm sure you are not fit to walk to Bilby-road," said the lady, kindly. "Come home with me; the girls will all be in bed, and you and I will have our supper cozily together. I'll send a servant home with you afterwards."

She was the principal of a flourishing school, and Nell's very greatest patroness. It would never have done to offend her; besides, the girl's heart warmed to the kindness. She followed Mrs. Ward to the cab which the lady had chartered, in perfect silence.

Neither of them spoke on the journey; only when the cab stopped at Acacia House, Mrs. Ward told the man to wait for a note she wanted taken, and leaving Nell before a cosy fire she retired to write it.

She came back in about ten minutes with her things off. Very gently she unfasted Nell's jacket, and chafed the cold fingers in her warm ones; not till then did the girl look up and say faintly,—

"How kind you are!"

"You are just tired out," said her hostess. "I have sent word to Mrs. Stuart I shall keep you all night, so she won't be alarmed. I am quite sure you are not fit to walk through all this snow."

The young music teacher tried to thank her, but the words died away.

"There, there, you mustn't speak till you've had some supper. You've no more colour in you than a snowflake."

The supper came and went, but the colour did not return to Nell's cheeks. Then Mrs. Ward drew a low chair up to the fire, and said, gently,—

"My dear, I can see you are in trouble. Can I be of any use to you? Can I help you?"

Nell, who was seated at her feet, shook her head, faintly.

"No one can help me; no one in all the world."

"I think I can, Miss Stuart. Do you know I saw you in the waiting-room to-night, and I think I can tell pretty well what troubles you."

Nell's cheeks burnt.

"My dear," said the other woman, simply, "I am only a schoolmistress, but I can see things pretty plainly. Mr. Vernon is not worth your regrets; before he ever saw your face he was engaged to another girl."

"Is it true?"

"It is quite true. My husband was vicar of his father's parish. Lord Vernon has shown me much kindness. I have a great respect for him. I wish I could say as much for his son."

Nell looked at her with a dumb, questioning gaze.

"It was settled years ago, but his fiancée is very young, and so it was arranged that she should remain quietly with her guardian while Mr. Vernon saw the world."

Nell shuddered.

"And I thought he loved me!"

"You must never meet him again," said her mentor; "for your own sake, you must never meet him again as you have done to-night."

"Oh, no, we parted to-night—for ever."

"Poor child, it hurts you."

"I think it has broken my heart. Oh, Mrs. Ward, I wish I could die!"

"Hush! you mustn't say that. You are so young, only nineteen. Life may hold much happiness for you, my dear child."

"I shall never be happy again. I shall be reminded of him at every hour. How can I forget him in the place where he taught me to love him?"

"It would be difficult," musingly. "I suppose your mother would not like you to leave home!"

"I don't believe she'd mind. Mamma doesn't love me much. Bee is her darling."

Mrs. Ward pondered a little.

"I think it would be best for you to go. Why not enter some family as resident governess. You would at least have change of scene."

Nell shook her head.

"I have no one to recommend me; such things are hard to find, and we are so poor I could never manage the dresses."

Mrs. Ward put one hand on hers.

"I took a fancy to you the first time I saw you," she said, kindly. "I had one daughter of my own once; had she lived she might have been your age. For her sake, Helena, will you bury your pride, and let me help you?"

"Willingly. I don't think I could be proud with you; you have always been so good to me."

Nell went home the next day a little graver, a little quieter than before, but with no other sign of the revolution that had swept away her hopes. She told Bee simply she meant to go away from home, and Mrs. Ward was advertising for a situation for her. Bee was half bewildered at the news. She could not bear the thought of losing Nell; but it would certainly be charming to take Nell's place.

Mrs. Stuart's reception of the news was very different.

"You always were a disappointment to me, and you always will be. Why can't you marry Mr. Bilby, and settle down respectably?"

"Mother dear, teaching is very respectable," put in Bee, trying to defend her sister; "and Mr. Bilby's face is so red; besides, he drops all his h's. I'm sure Nell would be wretched with him."

"If your father had had a few more pounds and a few less h's, I might have been left better off," retorted the widow. "I'm sure if my poor pa, who was in the public line, and very genteel, could see the way his Mary Ann is left, it would be enough to make him turn in his grave."

"I think I'm glad grandfather isn't alive!" said Bee, mischievously to her sister, when their mother had gone to bewail her woes in her own room. "I don't fancy we should like a relation in the public line, Nell, however genteel he might be!"

"I am sure we shouldn't."

Then began three weeks of alternate hopes and fears. Mrs. Ward advertised lavishly, and answers came occasionally; but when people saw Helena's delicate face and fragile form they never wished to engage her. Some honestly thought her too delicate; others did not care to have a governess whose refinement surpassed their own. Christmas was passed; when one cold, bleak, frosty morning, Nell received a highly perfumed and crated note, saying briefly the Lady Daryl would be

glad to see "A. B. C." that afternoon at three o'clock.

Bee was almost beside herself.

"A real lady of title! Nell, don't you feel a bit elated? Fancy if you lived in a nobleman's family!"

Nell remembered she had hoped, not so long ago, to enter a nobleman's family as his daughter-in-law; but her sister knew nothing of that.

She was punctual to the appointment. Lady Daryl was a fair, comely woman not much over forty, and decidedly inclined to embonpoint. She received Nell with more cordiality than that young lady had expected.

"Sit down, Miss Stuart!" she said, kindly, "and let us understand each other. Do you object to go more than two hundred miles from London? and should you expect holidays more than once a year?"

Nell answered, simply, in the negative. Lady Daryl stared.

"Well, you are more sensible than most girls. I have seen twenty or thirty, and they all regarded Yorkshire as a wilderness."

"I am quite willing!" returned Nell. "I have lived all my life in London. I should be glad to get out of it."

"And you don't expect gaiety or society? My brother-in-law's house stands in a park. I don't suppose you've any idea how lonely it is!"

"You are not seeking a governess for yourself, then?"

"Oh, dear, no! I've no children, thank goodness. I keep my brother's house until he marries again, which he is sure to do soon. I've had five or six governesses, but they all complain of low spirits and loneliness; just as if anyone wanted a governess just for the pleasure of amusing her."

This speech was not so heartless as it sounded. The lady had an unpleasant knack of speaking her thoughts aloud—a very unpleasant habit for her listeners.

A little conversation followed; Lady Daryl appeared satisfied. She promised to write to Mrs. Ward, and forward her decision to Nell when she heard from the schoolmistress.

"You will go!" said Bee, when she had received a full account of the interview. "I feel as if you would be sure to go."

"And Bee was right. Just one week after, when January was not many days old, Miss Stuart met Lady Daryl by appointment at King's Cross, to travel in her company to the nearest station to Alandyke, the residence of Sir Jocelyn Leigh, whose little daughters were to enjoy her care.

She had been a little nervous as to her powers of sustaining a conversation for so many hours; but she need not have feared. Lady Daryl slept peacefully most of the time, only waking at rare intervals to partake of refreshments. And so the journey proved less formidable than poor Nell had expected.

She leaned back in her corner, and wondered if it was all a dream. Could it really be that she, who had never seen anything grander than the drawing-room of Acacia House, was to reside in a mansion?

She wondered what the children were like; her comfort depended a good deal on them since they were to be her sole companions; she hoped they were not spoilt, and that she could teach them to love her. That wish was still in her mind when the train stopped at Wharton, and Nell, collecting Lady Daryl's wraps and newspapers, prepared to assist her ladyship to alight, but was spared the trouble by a grave, earnest-looking man, who came forward, saying pleasantly,—

"Welcome home, Hortensia! I have been expecting you anxiously. The weather was so bad I thought you might be delayed."

"Oh, no, we came tolerably swiftly. Jocelyn, this is Miss Stuart, the governess I engaged for the children."

Sir Jocelyn honoured Nell with a low bow, but he looked at her so intently as to make her feel quite uncomfortable. Then he rallied himself by an effort, handed the ladies to the carriage, sprang in after them, and in another moment the splendid bays were bearing them rapidly homeward.



"I THOUGHT YOU WOULD NOT FAIL ME, MY DARLING!" HE SAID.

"How are the children!" Lady Daryl found time to ask. "You never mentioned them in your letters, Jocelyn."

"I believe they are well."

"And Adela's cold?" Then turning to Nell, "Adela is the heiress of Alandyke, Miss Stuart."

"She is nothing of the kind," said Sir Jocelyn, bluntly. "I won't have the child's head crammed with such nonsense, poor little maid!"

"But it's the truth," persisted Lady Daryl. "Unless you marry and have a son, Adela must one day be mistress of Alandyke."

Sir Jocelyn did not answer her; he retired into his shell and spoke no more before the carriage stopped before the grand entrance to Alandyke.

Nell determined that he must be a very ill-tempered man to be put out by such a trifle. How grave and stern he looked, and how little affection he evinced for his motherless children! He turned to her abruptly as she got out of the carriage,—

"Have you ever been to Yorkshire before, Miss Stuart?"

"Oh, no!"

"You don't look country born and bred."

"I have lived in London all my life."

"Ah!"

Again she was conscious of that close scrutiny, too earnest to be deemed rude, too intent to be quite pleasant. Nell decided he was short-sighted, and then she followed Lady Daryl upstairs to see the rooms prepared for her. Truly there was little cause for complaint—a bedroom, larger in itself than their three apartments at No. 6, Bilby-road, and a pleasant schoolroom beyond, fitted up with every regard to comfort.

"Governesses ought to stay," said Lady Daryl, a little petulantly. "This is one of the most cheerful rooms in the house. Miss Stuart, you will not see the children to-night. I will order tea for you here, and I shall expect to see you in the drawing-room at nine. I hope you will be com-

fortable. If you want anything don't hesitate to ring the bell; there is one servant kept on purpose to attend to you."

Left alone by the cheerful fire Nell's thoughts flew swiftly back to the home she had left. If only Bee could see her now, how pleased her little sister would be at the sight of all her grandeur. Before she went to bed she must write her a long letter, and tell her all about it. Here Nell sighed, as she reflected how long it would be before her arms clasped Bee again.

Enter a maid bearing tea, a pleasant, rosy-cheeked girl, who, to Nell's relief, did not speak with a Yorkshire accent. The dread of not understanding the servant's language had troubled Miss Stuart not a little. She seemed inclined to talk, and the young governess did not check her as a more experienced person would have done.

"I hope you'll be comfortable, miss, I'm sure, and stay here, for the poor, dear children's sakes. They must be getting well-nigh tired of seeing strange faces."

"Are they in bed? Shan't I see them to-night?"

"They are in bed this hour, miss. They always go at seven. Nurse says it's their papa's wish, for fear they should come down to desert if they sat up later. Sir Jocelyn can't bear children."

"But these are his own," expostulated Nell. "Surely he must love them!"

"Sir Jocelyn loves nothing but himself, miss. Anyone in the parish will tell you the same thing; but he'll never prosper; there's a curse on him and his."

Nell shuddered, the girl spoke with such energy. Then, recovering breath, she went on,—

"The master's the richest gentleman in the county, but he don't spend the quarter of his income, miss. He's just turned sour since my lady died."

"I daresay it troubled him," said Nell, sympathetically. "Was she ill long?"

"Nigh on five years, miss. Folks say Sir

Jocelyn has never got over her death. He didn't ought to, for she died of a broken heart. She just pined away and died."

The maid departed, and Nell tried to collect her thoughts. She seemed to have come to an abode of mysteries. There might be no truth in the servant's gossip, but she felt sure Sir Jocelyn was a peculiar man, and instinctively she hoped his children were not on his model. She tried to do justice to the dainty food set before her, but it was the first solitary meal she had ever taken, and there was something sad in the experiment. When Mary appeared to remove the things she exclaimed at the little the young lady had eaten.

"It's just upon nine, miss. Shall I show you the way to the drawing-room?"

Miss Stuart thanked her; looked at her small white face in the glass, smoothed back a refractory hair, and prepared to follow.

It was quite a journey from her own apartments to the drawing-room, and she congratulated herself on having a guide, for she would never have found her own way through all those never-ending corridors and winding passages. At last they stood before a door which Mary just indicated with her finger and passed on, leaving Nell to enter alone.

For a moment she hesitated. After the tale she had heard of Sir Jocelyn she almost dreaded the sight of him in the flesh; then she turned the handle and went in. She need not have feared the Baronet's presence, he was shut up in his smoking-room; but Lady Daryl had another companion, the sight of whom made every pulse in Nell's heart throb. In an easy chair opposite the window, very much at home, a careless smile on his handsome face, sat her lover of one little month ago—Guy Vernon.

(To be continued.)

THE Icelanders will not burn ash for firewood, because of their curious superstition that those who sit about such a fire will become enemies.



"I AM SURE I SHALL LIKE THE MANOR!" FLORENCE ANSWERED.

HER GREAT MISTAKE.

—10—

CHAPTER VI.

It was her mother. Swift as lightning's flash the truth came home to Florence Warburton; this weary, sad-faced woman, whose very voice had thrilled her with the recollection of something once familiar, was her mother.

They stood together, the moon's soft light falling on them both—the girl young and beautiful, just on the threshold of life, a fair, bright future stretching out before her—the mother prematurely old, her face aged by another hand than Time's, and yet with just sufficient resemblance to her child to sadden the spectator. Either Florence was a vision of her mother's departed youth and innocence, or that mother herself was the counterpart of what sorrow and suffering might make her daughter.

"Mother!"

Only the one word, and yet those wasted arms were round her, the first smile those lips had known for fifteen years came at that girlish voice.

"My child! my darling! Oh! Florence, my little girl who has grown up away from her mother, how my heart has hungered for you!"

"They told me you were dead," whispered the girl; "no one would ever talk to me about you. Oh, mother, I have wanted you so!"

Doris was stroking her child's hand—not by words did she answer her, but her very touch was a caress.

"What does it mean!" asked Florence, wistfully; "why did you keep away from me, mother? why did you let papa grieve for you as dead?"

"He never did that, Florence."

"Yes, I have heard it again and again; he never held up his head after your loss. His heart broke then, though he lived on for fifteen years."

"Florence, look at me."

The girl raised her brown eyes to her mother's face. Something she saw there went to her very heart.

"You loved him," she cried, simply; "you loved him and me—and yet you left us."

"It was my wretched pride. I loved your father as my own life, Florence, but his friends had always disapproved of his marriage, and his sisters were never weary of trying to sow dissensions between us."

"But you loved each other?"

"Ay, but your father was a passionate, jealous man. I was young and fair in those days, Florence; I had not been carefully brought up. I loved my husband as my own soul, I trusted him as myself—I could not understand his doubts of me. I was his wife; surely he ought to believe in me, and to give no heed to the idle tales his sisters brought him."

"And you quarrelled?"

"We never quarrelled," she paused, as though to seek words which should best convey her meaning—"only one night, stung by his suspicions, I left him—I gave up home, husband, and child, just for pride's sake."

Florence felt her tears falling down her cheeks.

"He believed the worst he could believe," went on Mrs. Warburton, slowly; "my pride had played into his sisters' hands, it had wrecked my own life."

"But couldn't you have gone back?"

The mother shook her head.

"There are some steps, child, we cannot retrace—some acts we can't blot out, though we would fain wash them with our blood. Oh! how my heart ached when I left my home, Florence! It was like a dead person's coming back to life, and hearing herself spoken of as departed. My home was broken up; Mr. Warburton's death was openly announced; my husband went to India; and they placed you, a little child, at school."

"But how did you learn all this?"

"Never mind, I had my ways and means;

once a term I used to go to Kensington and watch the girls go for their walk. I watched you grow from babyhood to childhood, from childhood to womanhood, and each time an awful longing came on me to stretch out my hand and touch, if it were only your dress—just to feel that you were mine—mine!"

"And where do you live—how do you spend your time?"

"I live in London. Oh, I find plenty to do—plenty. I came here now just to see you. They told me you were to be married, and I longed to wish you joy. I called myself an old friend of your mother; I never thought you would guess the truth."

"It came on me in an instant—I think it was your voice. Didn't you sing lullabies to me long ago, when I was a baby, or why is it your voice seemed to strike some inner chord in my heart?"

"And you are happy?"

"I am happier than I dreamed of, mother! You will let me tell Alan! You will let me bring him to you!"

The wail from Caroline-street shook her head.

"No."

"But I must tell him! How can I keep such a secret from him?"

"Don't you understand, child," said her mother, hoarsely; "no one would let you speak to me! They have told you I am dead, for fear you should try to seek me out. I am the shadow in your past—the one thing in your history you must hide for ever from your husband!"

Florence hesitated.

"You don't know Alan, mother. He is so brave and generous, so strong and true. He is always ready to protect the weak. I think he would love you dearly when he knew how you suffered."

Doris trembled like an aspen leaf.

"You must never tell him, Florence, never—never! Not only would he forbid all inter-

course with me, but he might spurn you for my sake!"

In her innocence, in her simplicity, the reason of her mother's warning never came home to Florence. She only said, sadly,—
"But if Alan does not know we must be strangers still."

"No matter; I can see you sometimes, and I will not have your happiness risked for a foible. Listen, Florence! I charge you never to mention my name to Lord Eldale! It is your mother's first command! You will keep it for her sake!"

And against every instinct of her nature, Florence Warburton yielded. How could she refuse this sorrowful, weary creature, who looked at her with eyes so like her own, and gave her the mother's love she had so sorely missed!

"I must go!" she said, at last, slowly. "Mother, will you write to me—will you tell me how you are going on?"

Doris shook her head.

"I will never write to you; it might bring trouble upon you. I shall be in church to see you married; then when you come home I shall hear where you are from the papers. And if my heart bingers for a sight of you, I can manage it. You'll be a great lady then, and it won't seem strange if people want to look at you."

The girl looked into her mother's face. Her eyes went from her dress to her mother's.

Doris understood.

"No," she said, simply, "I wouldn't take money from you, my darling; and I can earn enough to keep me from want. It's best for me to be busy, Florence. When a woman's heart is as near broken as mine, hard work is the only thing that saves her from dwelling on the past till she's almost mad with regret and longing."

Florence clung to her with a little cry.

"Why should there be such a distance between us? Why should I be a countess, with silks and velvets and jewels, while my mother toils for daily bread?"

"So that you are happy," answered Doris, slowly, "nothing else troubles me now. I think, my darling, it would have killed me if the shadow of my life had fallen on yours to cloud it!"

It was quite late when Florence found herself in her own room. Her maid, tired of waiting for her bell, and hearing from the other servants how early she had left the drawing-room, had decided her services would not be required, and departed to bed.

Miss Warburton addressed herself; but as she laid her aching head upon the pillow there was a strange perplexity at her heart.

What did it all mean? What must she not tell Alan—her mother was sweet and lovable, and a lady! Why, because she had not got on with her husband's kindred, and had been alienated from him through their machinations, was she to be shunned and avoided?

It was a problem beyond Florence, and before it was solved she fell asleep.

She looked tired and languid the next morning. The excitement she had undergone, and the troubled restless night had left their marks on the fair face.

Mrs. Fox exclaimed, when she greeted her,—

"What have you been doing to yourself? You look as if you had seen a ghost!"

"I feel tired."

"And yet you did nothing yesterday! I think you hardly went out all day!"

Florence began her breakfast, hoping her aunt's anxiety was satisfied; but she had hardly taken two mouthfuls when Mrs. Fox again interrupted.

"I am sure you don't look fit to go to Lady Emily's this morning!"

Florence had completely forgotten that she had engaged to lunch with her future kinswoman.

"Oh, I shall be well enough for that!"

But when she reached Westfield Lady Emily saw at once something was wrong. She said

nothing until the girl had taken off her wraps and was sitting on a low chair by the fire.

"What is the matter, dear?"

"Nothing."

"You look troubled. Are you growing nervous now the 1st of December is so near?"

The girl looked at her friend's face, and seeing nothing but kindness written there she got up impetuously, threw herself on the ground, buried her head in Lady Emily's lap, and sobbed as though her heart would break.

Her hostess never tried to stop her tears. She knew they would be a relief, and she guessed that something of an uncommon nature was troubling her favourite. She said nothing, only from time to time she caressed the girl's soft hair with a fond, motherly touch.

"You are over-excited," she said, at last. "Surely, dear, you are not afraid! Alan may seem hard and stern to strangers, but he loves you as his own life!"

Florence clung to her with a convulsive shudder.

"Oh, Lady Emily, will he love me always—will he love me last my life?"

"You foolish child; of course it will!"

Florence shuddered.

"I think if it didn't—if Alan ever repented our marriage—or ever loved me less—I should kill myself! It would be very wicked, of course; but I could not live without his love."

Of all troubles this was the last Lady Emily had expected to hear. To her, and to all who saw them together, it was evident that Lord Eldale worshipped the ground his betrothed walked on.

He was not a man likely to change. To doubt his love continuing seemed absurd.

"My dear Florence," said Lady Emily, taking her hand, "how can you have taken such a fear into your head?"

"I don't know. Alan hasn't seen much of me; and he thinks me much better than I am. When he finds out the truth, he—"

Lady Emily fairly laughed.

"Dear, what is there for him to find out? I don't expect him to make any very alarming discoveries, I can tell you!"

A long silence.

"Was this all your trouble?"

"Not quite."

"Can't you trust me, Florence?"

The girl looked thoughtfully into the fire.

"I wonder how far a promise is binding!" Lady Emily felt mystified.

"A promise is a very solemn thing."

"Yes. If one promised a friend to keep their secret, and yet saw it would be far better for them not to keep it, how then?"

"The promise would be binding," said Lady Emily, promptly; "for we could not really know what reason made them want to keep the secret. And, after all, they are the best judges of what is for their happiness."

Lunch was announced, and with lunch came Cecil. It was his first meeting with Florence Warburton since he knew she was to be his cousin's wife.

He devoted himself to her entertainment with all his old chivalry. There was nothing in his voice or manner to betray his feelings, and yet all the while there was but one thought on his mind—how gladly he would have stood in Alan's place.

"I must congratulate you," he said, when lunch was over, and his mother had left them alone. "I little thought, when I met you in the train, how near you were to be to me."

Florence began playing with Alan's diamond ring.

"If only I can make him happy," she said, at last, with a sigh which was almost a sob.

"I don't think there can be any doubt of that. I wish my dear old chief had lived to see his daughter Countess Eldale. He was just the man to appreciate Alan."

Florence blushed crimson at this praise of her betrothed.

"I wish he had lived," she said, simply, "just for Alan's sake."

She was thinking had her father been alive she

would never have been burdened with a secret she must keep from Alan.

Cecil barely understood her meaning; and he had no time to ascertain it, for the door opened at that moment, and Lord Eldale himself appeared.

The two were sitting opposite each other. Florence's face was flushed by the bright, fiery glow from the hearth. Cecil's eyes were full of animation.

At first sight it would not have been unnatural to take them for lovers. It dawned on Alan that many would think Cecil more suited to the girl than himself. He came of a fiercely jealous race, and at that moment the spark of distrust was lighted in his heart which was to bear such bitter fruit.

He spoke to Florence indifferently enough, and shook hands with his cousin. Cecil was not long in relieving them of his presence; then the girl slipped one little hand into her lover's.

"Alan!"

Her voice seemed to act on him as a magic spell.

He took her in his arms and kissed her passionately again and again; then he looked into her eyes as though he would read her very soul.

"Ah!" she whispered, "I am so glad you are come back, I have missed you so."

"Really?"

"Really!"

"You love me a little then, Floy, though I am nearly twice your age!"

She put one little hand lovingly into his.

"I love you with all my heart," she said. "I shall love you till I die."

"Florence!"

"Yes."

"Do you know what struck me when I came in, what I was stupid enough to think?"

"I have no idea."

"That Cecil would have been more fitted to your bright youth than I."

She nestled the least bit closer.

"But I do not love Cecil!"

Alan stroked her hair caressingly.

"Four days more and you will be all my own," he cried, eagerly. "Darling, I think I am selfish enough to be glad you have no one very near to you—no father or mother to leave for me."

It was on her lips to tell him her secret—the secret hardly a day old, and yet such a bitter burden to her; but the thought of her solemn promise held her back.

Florence never quite knew how she passed the next three days. She remembered that Alan claimed her every leisure moment; that her aunt's maid was always trying on the dresses sent down by the Countess. And though it all she was dimly conscious that someone lingered in Foxgrove village, just to be near her—that someone was always on the watch to see her when she walked or drove, and that though the closest tie united them, she had to pass this "someone" without even a bow or nod.

The wedding-day dawned at last, one of those clear frosty mornings which sometimes come in early winter. Certainly, if the old proverb has any truth, Florence should have been happy, for the winter sunshine poured into the room where the maids were dressing her for her bridal.

She wore a soft white silk trimmed with rare old lace. A strange superstitious feeling made her desire not to wear the pearls which had decked her mother on that other wedding-day—not yet a score of years ago; for all ornaments she wore a necklace of gold supporting a heart-shaped locket, the gift of Lord Eldale.

Pussy surveyed her admiringly.

"You make a lovely bride—only too real!"

"But I am real," objected Florence, "real flesh and blood."

"I don't mean that," and Pussy shook her head. "You are much too really in love—anyone can see that by looking at you; you're not thinking of your coronet, or title, or riches, but just of one particular man. It's romantic, child, and romance is out of fashion now-a-days!"

It was a very pretty wedding everyone said. The slight, childish-looking bride and the tall, stately groom were a couple to be remembered.

As she signed her name for the last time in the old familiar fashion it seemed to Florence she must surely be in a dream. Not five months ago she had been a careless schoolgirl; could it be possible that she was now an English peeress—a wife?

It seemed so; already the clergyman was making a courteous speech to "Lady Elsdale," already Alan's voice spoke of her by the tenderest name a man can give a woman.

He gave her his arm, and led her proudly down the aisle, the village children strewing flowers in her path.

A dense crowd had gathered at the porch, and as the Countess passed to her carriage a woman of the people pressed forward as though to gain a better view. Her rusty black gown touched the snowy bridal satin.

Lord Elsdale drew his wife impulsively away, as though he could not bear such contact, and placed her in the carriage, and then he noticed that she was trembling from head to foot.

There was no voice to tell him that that woman of the people was her mother; no one to whisper that when he drew her hastily aside, as though he feared contamination by that momentary contact, he was parting mother and child, and plucking with yet another wound a heart well-nigh broken.

CHAPTER VII.

THE widowed Lady Elsdale had of course heard of her nephew's engagement, and the news troubled her not a little. She loved Alan very dearly; she had sorrowed bitterly when her own son robbed him of his affianced bride, but of late years she had conceived a plan of her own for rewarding his constancy (as she termed the steady avoidance he had paid to woman since his disappointment).

The Dowager was not rich. She had married her husband in early youth against his father's wishes, and so the provision made for her was small—barely six hundred a year—and, small as it was, at her death it reverted to the reigning Earl of Elsdale.

Sybil Lady Dane was entirely dependent upon her mother-in-law, and when she died would be penniless.

The widowed Countess lamented this sadly, and from her lamentations there sprang her plan that Alan and his fair false love of other days should be brought together again, and Sybil enjoy in very truth the title for the chance of which she had once jilted Alan.

There was just one drawback to Lady Elsdale's plan. The young Earl never accepted her invitations. When she hinted plainly it would give her pleasure to revisit the home where all the years of her married life had been spent, he answered promptly, putting Elsdale Manor and its contents at her disposal for as long a time as she chose to accept it, but at the same time he regretted his own engagements prevented him from meeting her there.

But still she did not despair. She hoped against hope that some chance might throw the two together, when she believed the old love would rise again in their hearts, and while she was making plans to bring about that much-wished-for meeting Alan lost his heart to a little girl with a pair of big brown eyes.

Poor Lady Elsdale! His letter vexed her more than he knew. She dreaded breaking the subject to Sybil. Sybil's temper left much to desire, as her mother-in-law knew full well.

"I have had a letter from Alan."

"Yes. Is he well?"

"Quite."

"When is he coming here?"

"He does not say."

"It was not his turn to write—why you heard from him only last week."

"Yes, but this letter is to give me some news. I am very much surprised, Sybil—surprised and grieved, too."

Lady Dane looked at the Countess with an expression not good to see in her beautiful eyes.

"Who is it?"

"My dear, who is what?"

"Whom is your nephew going to marry? Of course that is what he writes about!"

Lady Elsdale hastened to communicate all she knew. She did not like her daughter-in-law's way of taking the news. There was something in Sybil's face which told she felt more than she said.

"A schoolgirl!" she remarked, at last, with cutting scorn; "a bread-and-butter miss. Well, Alan must be beside himself—at his time of life!"

"My dear, he is only five-and-thirty!"

"But he has seen the world. He has been in every country worth visiting; he knows what beauty and intelligence are."

"Miss Warburton may have both."

"Miss Warburton has common sense, I should imagine. She has caught the greatest prize of the day. I suppose Alan considers himself a very happy man."

The Countess could not help a little retort.

"My dear Sybil, I think you ought to be the last person in the world to scoff at Alan's marriage. He surely suffered enough at your hands!"

"Well!" returned Lady Dane, coolly, as if she had not heard the sentence; "we had better write off at once, mamma, and convey our most humble congratulations. We won't go to the wedding—it would knock you up and remind me of my own afflictions—but we will say we hope to make the young Lady Elsdale's acquaintance upon the earliest opportunity."

The letter was written and sent. So kind and cordial were its sentiments, so full of cousinly affection and goodwill for the young bride, that Alan relented when he had read it, and thought he had judged Sybil too harshly.

"She may have conquered her deceit. After all it is years ago. She seems a devoted daughter to my aunt. Yes, I will certainly ask them both on a visit to the Manor; it will be nice for Florence to have such friends."

The ladies did not wait for an invitation. Whilst Alan and his bride were yet abroad, just as they began to think of coming home, the Earl received a letter from his aunt, offering to go herself to the Manor and see that all was in order for the bride's reception, and then wait a few days for the pleasure of making her niece's acquaintance.

"It is a kind offer," said Alan, speaking of it to his wife.

She looked at him wistfully with her big brown eyes.

"Would they stay very long?"

He laughed.

"No, you foolish child; only a few days—probably not that. I am quite as averse to their interrupting our happy *tête-à-tête* as you can be, Floy; only I don't know what excuse to make. The Manor is my aunt's old home; it would be a little hard to refuse to welcome her to the home of which she was mistress for so long."

Florence understood.

"I never thought of that," she whispered.

"Of course she must come!"

"And Sybil will be a nice companion for you,"

he said, speaking a little awkwardly. "She used to be a very fascinating person."

"Is she old?"

"No. Why?"

"Because you said 'used to be,' and that sounded as if she couldn't be very young."

"She is a little more than eighteen."

"Alan don't laugh at me, I am getting older every day."

"So are we all, I expect, sweet; but I wouldn't be guilty of such audacity as to laugh at the youngest English Countess, Floy," changing his voice to earnestness. "When shall we go home?"

She did not answer as he expected, "When you like"; nor did she name any special time; she gave a little cry, almost a sob, and threw her arms round his neck.

"My darling, what is it?"

"Alan, don't take me home. I am so happy here. We have each other; we don't want anything else."

Lord Elsdale pressed her to his heart; but he never thought of giving up his wishes.

"We can't stay here always, Floy."

"Can't we?"

"Don't you see, dear, we are English, and our home, our estates have some claim on us. My darling, don't you think my love can content you, even in England? Floy, we shall have each other there."

She clung to him.

"I am so frightened."

"Frightened?"

"I can't bear to think of going back to England, Alan. I always seem to fear we shall be parted—that things can't be as they are here in happy France."

Lord Elsdale felt annoyed. He touched the third finger of her left hand.

"My dear, from the moment I placed that ring there no one had any power to part us. You were mine for ever."

"I don't think I meant actually parted and living in different places."

"What then?"

"I meant parted in heart. There are so many things seem to come between even married people."

"How did you find that out?"

It was a troublesome question. He knew that till she came to Foxgrove her life had been spent at school. The only married pair of whom she could have had any experience was her uncle and aunt, and certainly they were not an unhappy pair.

The subject dropped then, and was not resumed. The day was fixed for their leaving France, and it came all too soon for the young Countess.

As she drove at her husband's side to the railway-station it seemed to her that she was going to face dangers; that she left a paradise of love behind her, and that in front were fears, troubles, perplexities.

It was a long journey, but it was accomplished at last, and in the twilight of a February day the Earl and Countess arrived at Danecroft, the nearest station to Elsdale Manor. It was Florence's first visit to her husband's estate; her first introduction to his servants. The old coachman and footman looked with keen interest on the fair face of their new mistress.

"Quite another from Lady Dane," muttered the footman.

"Ay," returned the other, "let's hope she'll go home soon. I never was partial to her; and I do think she gets worse with keeping, like a rotten apple."

Alan, who was giving some directions to the groom, who had arrived with a cart for the luggage, lost this interesting conversation, but his wife heard it, and it hardly added to her comfort.

It was a long drive—five miles. Florence leant back in her corner without speaking; only as the horses dashed through the lodge gates, her hand stole into Alan's.

"Do you think they will like me?"

"Who?"

"Your aunt and cousin."

"My aunt will love you dearly. I don't think Sybil ever disliked anyone in her life; she never seemed to."

As they neared the house the light of many torches made the scene radiant. All Lord Elsdale's tenants were assembled, and as the carriage came within sight their cheers rent the air, such hearty thrilling voices. Florence knew by their very sound how much her husband was beloved.

The Earl alighted from the carriage, lifted his wife to the ground, and in a few well-chosen words expressed his thanks for the welcome.

Florence stood at his side, a strange light in her dark brown eyes, a sweet smile on her face.

She held her own place in those loyal Kentish hearts. They loved their master, and were conquered at first sight by the wistful, earnest gaze of those soft, clear brown eyes.

Up the terrace steps, through the open doorway to the hall, where all the servants were assembled, Alan led his wife.

Florence saw nothing except the face of an old lady dressed in black, and so full of kindness and

benevolence that the girl lost her fear. She went up to the widowed Countess and took her hand.

"Will you try and love me a little for Alan's sake?" asked the girl-wife.

She found herself clasped in a warm, motherly embrace, listening to hearty, earnest words of welcome, and so she missed the greeting between Lord Eldale and his cousin.

Lady Dane had almost cast aside her mourning; there was no attempt at a cap upon her glossy hair; a glowing pomegranate blossom nestled in its coils. A beautiful, fascinating woman, she seemed made to command homage and admiration.

Florence felt herself shrink into a timid little school-worm.

The two women, who for all time were to be rivals, shook hands, but their clasp was not hearty. Florence felt conscious of a limp, feeble pressure, and then her fingers were her own once more.

Lady Dane proposed to show the young Countess her rooms. It still wanted one hour to dinner-time, and Florence would gladly have lingered by the pleasant fire downstairs, but Sybil had risen, so there was no excuse, and she followed her upstairs, a little slowly and timidly, perhaps, but without a word of dissent.

Lady Dane soon introduced her cousin's bride to the apartments prepared for her. There she put Florence into a low chair by the fire, and, kneeling down, began to unfasten her wraps. She waited on her with such kind assiduity that Lady Eldale began to fancy she had been prejudiced indeed, to take an aversion to one so bright and helpful.

"Do you think you shall like the Manor?" asked Sybil. "Which have you been used to, town or country?"

"I am sure I shall like the Manor. I don't know many places in England. I was at school until last summer."

"But the holidays?" suggested Sybil.

"Oh, I spent those at school. I was an orphan; at least, with a sudden remembrance. I mean my father is dead."

"Your father! I thought I had heard you had lost both parents."

Florence made some inaudible reply.

Lady Dane went off to another subject.

"Alan looks well!"

"I think Lord Eldale is very well. France suited us both; we were so sorry to come away."

"Then why did you come?"

"Alan thought we ought to come. He wants to be among his own people; he says it is not right for a landlord to live away from his estate."

"Alan's confidences have become very tender suddenly. He has never spent a month at the Manor since the place came to him years ago. Of course," with a meaning smile, "it was easy to understand his reason."

"What was it?"

Sybil looked on the ground.

"The place had very painful associations for him. I am very glad that he has been able to overcome them."

She turned her eyes on Florence as she spoke the last words, to see if her shot had had effect. Two pink spots were burning in the bride's cheeks. She had known quite well when she married him that she was not her husband's first love; and yet it hurt her, ah! so cruelly, to hear this hinted by another's lips.

(To be continued.)

In many parts of Burma there are to be found numbers of remarkable sculptures, usually carved out of the living rock. Some very extraordinary carvings are to be found at Thonboon, on the Irrawaddy, where they are cut out of the face of a high cliff rising directly from the river bank, and are of great size. They consist of a succession of rudely-formed niches, in appearance something like the catacombs of Rome, and these are full of large and small images of Buddha, who is represented in several positions. On the summit of the cliff is a pagoda of great sanctity, which is visited every year by large numbers of pilgrims.

THE HEIRESS OF BEAUDESERT.

—O—O—

CHAPTER XV.

A LOST OPPORTUNITY.

LADY VALERIE felt strangely happy the next morning, and although she did not analyse her own reasons for being in such good spirits it is possible that Rex Verreker's enforced stay under the roof at Beaudesert had something to do with it. Also she was most likely much delighted to think that all Flossie Springold's charms, backed by the further argument of a fearful storm, could not avail to keep him at Scarsdale Park the night before.

The knowledge that he must go away filled her with vague alarm, for he alone knew of the danger which threatened her, and he alone, she said to herself with shivering eyes and a blushing cheek, could have the power to avert it. If he was poor she was boundlessly rich; if he had no position to compare with her own, she would willingly descend to his.

And then she turned away her pretty head for fear lest she should catch sight of her own blushing cheeks, for in her modest heart she scarcely dared to think of love under its own unmistakable name. It had been friendship until yesterday—friendship through all the long days of her slow recovery, till now, when the fear lest Miss Springold's charms had won the day, and kept him a willing prisoner, had raised a storm of indignation in her breast.

Even as she was thinking of her she came into the room hurriedly, with her habit caught up in her left hand, her blue eyes wide open as if with fear.

On seeing Valerie she darted towards her. "Oh, tell me, is he true—he can't be dead!" and she stood with clasped hands and heaving breast waiting for the answer.

"There is no one dead that I know of," said Valerie, coldly, irritated that any other woman should dare, not only to feel such interest in Rex Verreker, but also to show it. "Won't you sit down!"

"Then he wasn't killed," with a gasping sob. "They said the lightning—Oh, Heaven! I was half mad!" and Flossie sank down upon the first chair she saw near her.

"He had a narrow escape. His horse died," said Valerie, slowly, feeling her heart growing as hard as stone against the little beauty, although she ought to have softened at the remembrance of her own pangs of alarm the evening before.

"And he escaped! Not a broken bone, nor a scratch! Are you sure?" with vivid interest.

"He had a blow on his forehead, and the doctor says he is to be kept quiet," said Valerie, calmly, as she put her feet to the ground, and sat up.

"To be kept quiet! They always say that when there is anything serious. Oh, there's a dear creature, let me see him!" and she got up from her seat impulsively.

Lady Valerie opened her eyes to their faintest extent.

"He is in bed," she said quietly, as if that settled the matter for good and all.

"That makes no difference," said Miss Springold, with calm contempt. "I nursed my cousin Tom all through the rheumatic fever, and pulled him through besides, when the doctors had given him up. Let me go to him, we are such old friends."

"I tell you there is no danger," said Valerie, freezingly.

"They may tell you so, that is very likely. Why should they risk making you ill again for the sake of an acquaintance? But for me it is very different—he is my dearest friend," speaking rapidly, and clapping her hands tight together, "the best friend that girl ever had; and when he comes back from Vienna he will be my husband."

For an instant the room, with all its pretty ornaments, gilded chairs, alabaster statues, and vases of flowers, seemed to whirl round, and Valerie caught hold of the arm of the sofa as if to steady herself, and then with a mighty effort she got up quite calmly, and rang the bell.

"Ask if Mr. Verreker is asleep, and if anyone is with him," she said to the footman who answered it, and the sound of her voice was to her own ears like that of a stranger's, so cold and harsh.

"Thanks!" said Miss Springold, fervently, but Valerie took no notice of her.

The answer, brought back in two minutes, was that the doctor had just been and administered another sleeping-draught, and the patient was to be disturbed on no account whatever.

Then Miss Springold took herself off, forgetting to make the slightest inquiry after her hostess's health, and only begging her to let her know the last news that evening.

There was no real reason for anxiety, however. After a few days of quiet Verreker was himself again, and the doctor gave him permission to return to his diplomatic duties as soon as he liked.

As soon as he liked! The phrase seemed a mockery to him, when those duties must take him far away from England and Valerie. Did she love him? That was the question that haunted him night and day.

If she loved him it would be cruelty to go away and make no sign; and yet how could he, without any particular position, ask her to give herself to him with all the broad lands of Beaudesert, and half-a-dozen other places tacked on to her skirts?

The prosecution for murder had fallen through because the suspected person was not to be found. The police had paid an early visit to Ivers Keep; but, early as it was, the bird had flown.

Dr. Merton breathed freely when he heard it, and cast a look at Lady Valerie which she seemed to understand. Let the affair be buried in mystery, so long as Rex Verreker was safe; she could be content to let the would-be criminal go unhurt.

Not so Miss Beck, who, when she heard that the hunchback had run away, looked as if she would have liked to tear him to pieces with her own gentle fingers.

Valerie, to escape a discussion, took her hat and walked across the sunlit lawn to the shade of the slopes; and Verreker, seeing the glimmer of the white dress in the distance, got up from his own position, where he had been lying with his long legs stretched out on the grass under the willow-trees, and followed on her track.

She heard his step, and straightway sat down on a seat, for her knees were trembling. The smallest exertion was too much for her, but she was tired of lying on the sofa, and had determined to make an effort. Her heart beat fast as the sound of his steps came nearer, ever nearer, till at last he stood in front of her, his hat in his hand, a small sunbeam twinkling through the branches on his yellow hair.

"You feel stronger to-day?" he said, after a pause which had seemed long to her, because she knew that he was looking at her all the while, and tried to seem as if she did not know it.

"Yes, I am getting quite well. Papa talks of taking me abroad for a change, and I think I should like it."

"Ask him to bring you to Vienna," he said, with a conscious smile, waiting eagerly for her answer.

She looked down at the ivy growing over the arm of the seat.

"No, indeed; why should I? We have friends in Paris."

"I thought you had a friend in Vienna," he said, drawing himself up stiffly; "but if you don't think so, I suppose you haven't."

"A friend?" putting on an air of puzzled inquiry. "Oh, yourself, perhaps; but, then, we can see you in England."

"And quite enough of me, too," with exceeding bitterness, as the glory seemed to go out of the sunbeams and the sparkling waters, and a shadow came over the handsome face that had been so bright before.

"Scarsdale Park saves us from having too much," with a joyless laugh. "We ought to be thankful for having it so near."

His eyes flashed resentfully.

"I have been over there twice; no, three times, during the last six weeks."

"So much may be done in three long afternoons," she said, with an involuntary sigh, as she thought that during those three calls, with a sudden jump he had gone from friend-ship to the very bounds of matrimony. She could swear he was free when he played the part of her good genius on the night of the ball, and now he was tied for ever to the greatest flirt in Blankshire. He could not tell what she was alluding to, so answered, drily,—

"Yes, when there is much to be done."
"Miss Springgold will make a pretty bride," she said, thoughtfully, as if she were already picturing her in orange blossom and white satin, standing at the altar by Verreker's side. "I hope she will ask me to her wedding."
"Weddings are depressing things; worse than funerals."

"I hope you won't think so of your own," she said very low, with a slight quiver in her voice.
"My own!" a harsh laugh sounded through the silence of the wood—"I think there is more chance of the other thing."

Lady Valerie's heart gave a bound, as it flashed across her that there must be some mistake. With a new light in her eyes she looked up at him for the first time, and the next moment all would have been explained, but—

"How d'ye do, Lady Valerie?" said a cheerful voice close beside her, and Lord Daintree's broad form hid every glimpse of the river. "They told me I should find you somewhere about, so I thought I might venture to look for you."

The chance was gone, and Verreker stepped back in bitter disgust, knowing that he would not have another opportunity of speaking to Valerie alone.

Lord Daintree stayed to dinner, and stood by Lady Valerie's chair nearly all the evening.

In the early morning Rex Verreker started for Germany, and as he took his last look at the old towers of Beaudesert, he said to himself, "Good-bye to all that I care for; happiness is not for Rex Verreker," whilst Lady Valerie was weeping behind her curtains, with the rosebud in her hand which she had not had the courage to drop.

CHAPTER XVI.

PLAYING HER TRUMP.

REX VERREKER drove away from Beaudesert in a gloomy frame of mind, and with no eyes for the beauties of Nature with which he was surrounded.

The dew was sparkling on every blade of grass or fern-leaf, wild roses and honeysuckles hung down from the hedges as if to give him a fragrant greeting as he passed, but the dew that he wished for was a tear from the lashes of the girl that he loved, and the greeting that he longed for should have come from her ruby lips. Without those the brightness of the day only seemed to increase the dulness of his heart; with these a deluge might have fallen, and he would scarcely have felt it.

When he reached the station he got down, slipped something besides the reins into the groom's hand, and told a porter to bring his things; and walked into the booking-office to take his ticket.

As he was pocketing the change he heard a familiar voice say behind him, "First-class return, London," and looking round, to his amazement, he saw Miss Springgold in the daintiest of morning dresses.

"I did not expect to see you here at such an hour as this!" said Rex, not best pleased as he took off his hat, and shook hands.

Floieie blushed crimson—a very unusual circumstance with the self-possession Little Beauty.

"I—I have business in town."
"That dress looks more like pleasure," scanning the small figure from head to foot. "If you do your business in such a get-up as that I should think you would turn the soberest man's head. Can I look after your luggage?"

"I have no luggage," fumbling with the clasp of her purse, and bending her yellow head over it, as if she had suddenly grown short-sighted,

"Then you mean to return to-day! I wonder that Colonel Springgold allows you to travel alone."

"But he knew that I shouldn't be alone," looking up appealingly into his grave face. "Please give up your cigar for once, and don't go in a smoking carriage!"

What could he do but look delighted, show her into an ordinary first-class, and take the seat opposite to her. The groom from Beaudesert, having left the dog-cart in charge of a friend, came on to the platform to inquire after a parcel.

He looked up, and touched his hat as the train moved off, and Rex felt inclined to box his ears, because of the knowing smile which broadened into a grin when he thought himself out of sight.

Everyone in Beaudesert would hear that he had gone off with Miss Springgold, and what would Valerie think of him!

Gnawing his lip and feeling decidedly cross, Rex contemplated the pretty face before him with anything but admiration. Floieie looked up, caught his eye, and put on a pout which she had always found effective with her admirers.

"Don't I look nice!"

"Perfectly entrancing!" with a mock bow.

"How detestable you are! I thought you wouldn't be sorry to have a companion on your lonely journey, as you seemed rather in the dumps; but I wish I had gone in the guard's van rather than with you."

"If you wish it I will get out at the next station!"

"Thanks, you needn't trouble yourself. I shall try and forget you are there."

Opening her novel she retired into a corner and fixed her eyes on the page. He immediately sank into a brown study, wondering what would have been the consequence if the Marquis had not interrupted him, just as he was on the brink of an explanation with Lady Valerie.

He saw her eager, upturned face, the colour coming and going in her cheeks, her lovely lips parted, and he knew that he had lost her for want of a word. Had he been a fool, or only a man of honour kept back by a well-grounded scruple?

He was not calm enough to judge just then; but he remembered that men in his position, starting as he had done, with good birth and small fortune, had often climbed to the top of the tree.

A secretary of legation at Vienna might end by being an ambassador before he died; but if the reward were not likely to come till the evening of life, had he a right to ask the heiress of Beaudesert to wait till the glory of her noon-tide had passed?

What would her father say? He had gone over the same questions again and again, but he had never found a satisfactory answer. They wearied heart and brain, but he seemed to delight in self-torture, and pursued the same reflections night and day.

It was too early for the morning papers, or else he would have liked to have held one in his hand, so as to account for his morose silence. He had been rude—distinctly rude—and his conscience pricked him. He looked across, as he shifted one leg over another, and saw a small tear rolling down Miss Springgold's fair cheek.

In an instant he was filled with remorse, and anxious to make any amends that he could. What a brute he had been! It was almost incredible! He had never made a girl cry before, and he was thoroughly ashamed of himself.

What could he say to comfort her without going over the borderland which divides friendship from sentiment?

There lay the difficulty. Their intercourse had often developed into love-making before he lost his heart finally to Valerie de Montford; but now it was a dangerous amusement in which he was far too nervous to indulge.

"That seems a very interesting book," he observed presently, thinking that no fault could be found with so inoffensive a remark as that.

"Better than nothing!"—her eyes glued to the page.

"Miss Springgold," he began, hesitatingly, "I am afraid—"

"Why am I Miss Springgold now, when I was Floieie the other day?" she interrupted, almost fiercely.

He was taken aback, and showed it in his honest face. "Was I ever cool enough for that?"

"I don't call it cool between friends—real friends," she repeated, with emphasis, "but perhaps you wish me to consider you as a simple acquaintance?" inquiringly, with eyes raised to his.

They made him uncomfortable—there was no denying it. How often had he praised them indirectly with that dulcet flattery so sweet to the ears of women.

"No," he said, earnestly. "I don't see why we should go back to that."

"Or perhaps you would prefer to be a stranger?" still with those provoking eyes saying so much that the lips kept so.

"It might have been better for my peace," he rejoined unwisely, thinking of the breach that had been made between him and Valerie because of his visits to Searedale Park.

"I didn't know that I had troubled it," with lips that trembled. "Oh, Rex, you don't hate me quite!" with a burst of emotion, as she stretched out her small hands, as if appealing for an assurance of his friendship.

He took them in his, and kissed them—how could he help it!—and said in a low, earnest voice, "Hate you! No. I've not lost my senses yet."

She stooped forward, real tears forcing themselves from under her eyelids. A few months ago his arms would have been round her in a moment, and his golden monstaches would have dried them; but now, with Valerie's suspicions before his mind, he sat still, like an abashed schoolboy, feeling as if his rôle had been taken from him. Why did she tempt him when she knew that his heart was given to another?

Suddenly it occurred to him that he would make a clean breast of it, and, drawing on her compassion, secure her for an ally instead of an enemy.

"I've been a brute to you to-day," he began, frankly; "but I'm half mad. I think you would pity me if you knew the cause."

Her lips straightened, but she said nothing. He went on in spite of this discouraging beginning,—

"What is worse than to love a girl with all your heart, and to feel that you must stand by and see some other man win her because your fortune doesn't happen to equal his?"

A thrill of hope flashed through her, and a soft pink stole to her cheeks. "Was it possible, that after all, he had been fighting against his love, because he was afraid of being taken for a fortune hunter?"

Her heart beat fast, and for once in her life she felt a delicious shyness which made it difficult for her to raise her eyes.

"I should ask the girl herself," she said, softly.

"Would you?" he exclaimed, eagerly. "Do you think it would be honourable and right?"

"A fig for honour and right!" she cried, excitedly. "Neither will keep a girl's heart from breaking."

"You only say that out of kindness," his eyes softening at what he thought her great generosity. "In my place you would have done just the same as I have done, and made a mess of it all."

"I shouldn't," still with long lashes drooping on blushing cheeks. "I would have told her that I loved her, and let her decide."

"I almost wish I had," his eyes looking meaningly out of the window; "but it's too late now."

"Too late!" she whispered, softly, with one shy glance upwards.

"Yes, that sort of thing had better be done by word of mouth."

"Well!"

What could he mean! Surely if he wanted an

opportunity he couldn't have had a better one. She waited breathlessly, feeling that it must come before they reached Waterloo Station.

"You see I shan't see her again for an age, and what may happen before I come back!"

"Oh, Rex, I'd wait!" with crimson cheeks and a heart that nearly jumped out of her breast. He pressed her hands tenderly.

"You would if you really cared, but Valerie,"—his voice sinking—"I've never said a word to her, and she mightn't guess—she's such a child."

"V—Valerie!" she stammered, with white lips, as she snatched her hands roughly away. "What has she got to do with it?"

"Something, I suppose," with a smile. "You yourself proposed that I should speak to her."

"I didn't!" she cried, passionately, scarcely knowing what she said in the anguish of hurt pride and bitter disappointment. "That child of a child, if she has a heart at all, it's given on the sly to Colonel Darrell."

"I think you are mistaken," he said, very quietly, beginning to see that he had "put his foot in it" pretty considerably.

"I can prove it," pouting with rage.

"Pray do! It would interest me!"

"I'll proclaim it far and wide through the country!" her light eyes flashing maliciously. "She lost her character on the night of the ball, and everybody shall know it."

"Hush!" he says, with a frown. "I won't allow you to say it. What on earth makes you so spiteful against a young girl who has never done you an injury in your life!"

"No, she has never done me an injury—of course not. Very well, Mr. Verreker, go to Vienna, and find someone else to attach yourself to, for I bet you a hundred to one that when you come back you shall find Lady Valerie the wife of Colonel Darrell."

"Done!" and he took out his pocket-book. "Is it to be in gloves! If you are in the habit of paying your debts I shall be set up for life."

"I always pay," with a significant glance, "of whatever kind the debt may be."

"That's all right."

The train stopped, he opened the door and held out his hand to assist her to alight.

"I hope you will think so."

Then she jumped on to the platform without deigning to take any notice of his proffered hand.

He put her into a cab and turned away, shrugging his shoulders.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHO GAVE THE BOUQUET!

MARRIED to Colonel Darrell! What a ridiculous notion! The little fury might have hit on a more probable *parti*—the Marquis, for instance, who was a heavy, good-natured fellow, to whom Valerie had no objection.

Darrell she had only seen once in her life, and on that one occasion she had conceived a violent aversion to him. She would never see him again without a shudder, so there was no danger from that quarter.

No, there were not many rivals whom he need fear at present, but crowds would crop up as soon as the heiress made her *début* in London; and then would he be remembered when the most fascinating men in town were hovering round her with sweetest flattery on their lips?

Would she spare the exile a thought when she was the centre of an admiring crowd in a London drawing-room?

He thought of all this as he drove in his hansom to Charing Cross, and caught the tidal train to Dover.

But at the terminus his thoughts were turned in a different direction by the sight of a man watching eagerly, as if counting the passengers who were making their way into the steamer.

Where had he seen that lean, ill-favoured face before? He could not tell at first; but whilst he was standing on the deck, watching the play of the waves, he suddenly remembered that it was the same which had been photographed on

his brain by a flash of lightning the night of the storm.

There was a warrant out against the misshapen wretch, and it was fool-hardiness stretched to the extent of madness to show his face in England, where the police were on the look-out for him. What had brought him to Dover? Perhaps his master, Colonel Darrell, had set this man to watch his movements?

Rex threw back his head and gave a short laugh—that miserable scrap of humanity pitted against a man of six-foot two!

His own limbs were models of physical strength softened by the grace that comes with perfection of form, and he had carried off innumerable prizes at Eton and Oxford, won by his skill in athletics; but he forgot that dangerous things are wrapped in smallest packets, and the poison which might kill a whole town like a pestilence is contained in a tiny phial.

A man who has the bad fortune to have an unscrupulous enemy is never safe. He may be attacked in his reputation by a scandalous libel, which, though refuted, is sure to leave some stain behind, or he may be induced to store his money in a rotten bank, and find ruin staring him in the face instead of a comfortable competency; or the malice of the enemy may sink to lower depths, and life or health may pay the penalty.

Fearing nothing, Rex Verreker pursued his way, travelling night and day, unconscious that he was tracked from Ostend to Brussels, from Brussels to Cologne, from Cologne to Munich, from Munich to Vienna, and that he was saved from the peril that followed him by the haste that he made and his own unusual restlessness, which prevented him from taking any sleep, except in snatches.

There was one who prayed for him night and morning; and who can tell if his safety was not in answer to Valerie de Montfort's eager petition?

He might be going to marry Flore Springold, but yet she loved him; he might never come back to her until he was a husband, but still he would be nobler and better than any other man she had ever known; so how could she tear his image out of her heart and place another in its shrine?

The Earl, alarmed at her pale face and drooping spirits, carried her off for a tour abroad, and was delighted to find how soon she revived amidst the gaiety and the freshness of the Continent.

She was much admired wherever she went, but she seemed to have no personal vanity, and her head was not turned by it.

On their way back they stayed at the Hotel —, Paris, Valerie having set her heart on going to some of the French theatres. Her father seemed to have left all his sternness behind him on the English shores, and unbent in a way that charmed her. Miss Beck had gone away for a holiday, so that she had no one to consult but him, no one but him to appeal to, and they drew nearer together than ever before in their lives.

Several friends turned up unexpectedly, amongst whom were the Marquis de Daintree and Lord Marshall, and the former seemed inclined to forget Miss Springold's attractions, whilst the latter was disposed to forget that he was not a bachelor.

Lady Valerie was much amused with them both, and treated them with the frankness of old friendship.

Amongst the crowd of foreigners that surrounded her their two English faces were especially welcome, and she was sure to greet them with one of those rare sweet smiles that made the Frenchmen so jealous.

"Have I to thank you or Lord Daintree for this lovely bouquet?" she asked, one evening, when present at a *soirée* given by the wife of one of the Cabinet ministers.

"Ashamed to say I never thought of it, but I'll ask Bruin. Will you let me give you one for the ball the day after to-morrow?" and Lord Marshall looked unusually eager.

"No; I should feel as if I had asked for it!"

"Here, old fellow!" catching the Marquis by

the arm, "save me from a fit of rabid jealousy. Did you or did you not give Lady Valerie those roses?"

"No; but I should be only too proud—" "Of course; but that's not the question. Now, Lady Valerie, where did it come from? Pon my word, if it's one of those black-haired apes, all of the same pattern," with a deprecating glance over his shoulder, "I should feel inclined to pick a quarrel with him."

"Then I'm glad I can't satisfy your curiosity," with a smile. "It was on my table when I went up to dress, but Susan vows that she can't tell how it got there."

"Immense impertinence!" growled the Marquis. "Throw it away."

"Not for the world!" burying her face in the fragrant blossoms. "Wherever they came from they are the sweetest I ever smelt."

"I wager I could beat them at Belton," rather sullenly.

"I remember the Marchioness telling me that you had lovely flowers, but nothing could beat these."

"I'll bring you some over the first day you get back to Beaudesert."

"Ask the Earl to come and choose them, and we should have a second edition of 'Beauty and the Beast,'" said Lord Marshall, nudging his friend with his elbow.

The Marquis coloured.

"Don't talk bosh. If I send for some in time for the President's ball, Lady Valerie, will you throw away any others that those fellows over here may give you?"

"I won't throw them away, but I'll wear yours instead, if you take so much trouble about them."

"No trouble. Simply a telegram to the gardener and the thing's done."

"Haw, haw!" pulling his mousetache, "doesn't he talk like a grandiose grandee!"

"What happened to you to-night? You are perfectly insufferable. Isn't he, Lady Valerie?" She looked up at the Viscount with an amused smile.

"Something has put him out."

"It's that confounded bouquet. I beg your pardon, but my language is not half as strong as my feelings."

"That's such a trifle," looking down at it, admiringly. "I was perfectly savage before I came here to-night; but then I had just cause."

"What was it?" from both.

"I had set my heart on going to the Opera to-morrow to hear this new piece, and there isn't a seat to be had."

"Not for love or money!"

"We never thought of trying the first. I don't don't know how papa would set about it," looking very demure.

"Fraid I couldn't teach him," said the Marquis, "but you shall have the tickets if the other thing will do as well."

"You must have them," said Lord Marshall, excitedly. "We'll seize upon a box and take it by main force."

"I'm afraid the police would turn you out before I could get there. But don't worry yourselves about it; I've made up my mind to be disappointed."

"But you shan't be. Wish you had told me of this before."

"I believe the tickets were snapped up directly, there was such a rush for them. But never mind; I'll make papa take me somewhere else."

"I think we can do it if we put our mind to it," quoted Lord Marshall, with a smile. "In fact, we must, for I'd rather die than you should be disappointed."

"Pray don't; the Viscountess might object."

"There's a rap for you, old man," said the Marquis, in triumph. "I believe you had forgotten her existence."

Lord Marshall coloured.

"Lady Valerie is enough to make one forget everybody but herself."

Lady Valerie laughed a low, sweet laugh.

"Bravo! Lord Marshall, that pretty speech must have been given in Paris."

At that moment the hostess came up with a

distinguished foreigner, who had requested an introduction, and the two Englishmen moved off.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DUKE DE PERPIGNAN'S BOX.

THE Marquis of Daintree and Lord Marshall rushed about Paris like two madmen, in order to obtain the tickets for the Italian opera, on the possession of which Lady Valerie had set her heart.

But it was the first night of an opera by a popular author, and the expectations of the Parisians had risen to the highest pitch.

Consequently there was not a ticket to be had, and at the end of the day they had to confess themselves beaten.

The disappointment was great to both, for each had made up his mind to win a smile of gratitude from the sweetest lips in the world.

Cursing their ill-luck, they returned to the Grand Hotel just in time to dress for the table d'hôte. The Marquis had no sooner gone into his own apartments than he came out again and rapped at his friend's door.

"I say, look here," holding out a tiny note, when he perceived that the Viscount had another in his own hand. "How the deuce could she have got it?"

The notes were from Lady Valerie to invite them both to her box at the opera that evening.

"Can't imagine," shaking his head. "It's through some confounded Frenchman who wants to make up to her. Depend upon it, that's it; we might drop a word to her father."

"But we both tried our hardest," said the Marquis, with a smile on his broad, honest face; "and you can't make up to her, you know."

Lord Marshall looked cross.

"I'm an Englishman, and I should be a brute if I didn't look after my own country-woman."

"Oh, it's all on patriotic grounds, is it? Well, look sharp, or you won't be able to display your patriotism till the opera is half over," and with a mischievous glance the Marquis went back to his own room.

As the Opera House is within a few hundred yards of the Grand Hotel, the two friends were able to walk across the road in time to receive the Earl of Beaudesert and his daughter.

The scene looked very animated. The imposing front of the opera house was brilliantly lighted; a guard of honour was drawn up outside, their helmets gleaming brightly, the pavement was crowded with pedestrians, the roadway with carriages, and far away on either side stretched the rows of lights with a strain of music from some distant café, and a burst of laughter from some light-hearted Parisian, and the gleam of women's jewels through the open windows, and the rustle of their silks and satins as they flitted across the pavement.

As Lady Valerie, clothed in a white garment edged with feathers to match, took her seat in the front of the box, every glass on the opposite side of the house was turned in her direction.

Lord Daintree felt his own heart swell as he looked on her exceeding fairness. He would like to place a coronet on the top of that dainty head, and then dare the world to say one word against her.

That report about that mysterious fellow Darrell must be untrue, on the face of it, for he could wear his life that no snowdrop in a lonely wood was more pure than this girl with the bewitching smile; but there was more danger from the long-legged, good-looking Verreker, who looked inclined for anything desperate that last night before he started for Vienna.

He woke up from his reverie to hear Lord Marshall reproaching himself bitterly for having forgotten to send any flowers.

"But you see I have some!" and Valerie held up a lovely bunch of exotics, as if to claim his admiration.

"Lovely!" he said, looking at her instead of the flowers. "Much too good for him."

"What do you mean?" with wide open eyes.

He started and stammered, "I mean—I mean,

that a Frenchman has no right to bother you with his attentions."

"Don't you think papa is the best judge of that?" with a slight drawing up of her long neck, as if to tell him that she was not likely to suffer any man to pay her more attention than he ought.

"There now, I've offended you," in a tone of the deepest contrition.

The Marquis bent forward.

"Be pitiful, Lady Valerie, the poor fellow's quite gone to-night," tapping his forehead. "Ever since he heard that someone else had got you a box he has been only fit for Bedlam."

"So sorry; perhaps he will be comforted when he hears that I don't know who it was any more than he does. There was an envelope tied round the stalks of these flowers, and on opening it I found an order for this box."

"It is the box of the Duke de Perpignan," remarked the Earl, "but we have not the pleasure of his acquaintance, so some friend of his must have taken pity on us."

"Perpignan! I know the name very well," said Lord Marshall, thoughtfully, but the raising of the curtain reduced him to silence.

For the rest of the evening he was unusually grave, and kept looking round the crowded house as if anxious to find out a friend. He exchanged nods with innumerable acquaintances, but still remained unsatisfied.

Valerie, with girlish delight in the opera, would not speak a word whilst the music was going on, but during the pause after the second act she turned to the Viscount with a playful smile,—

"Not found her yet?"

He started.

"Do you think I could be looking for a woman?"

"Why not?"

"With you in the box!" looking all the admiration that he felt.

"Take care, old chaps! I shall write to your wife to-morrow," and the Marquis put his hand on his friend's shoulder.

Lord Marshall shook it off roughly.

"Don't be an idiot. Mayn't I look about for a man I know once, and may do like better than a brother, without any of your nonsense?"

"Look for a dozen men, or go after them."

Lady Valerie, dismiss him, he's become a bore."

"I haven't found it out," said Valerie, kindly, unwilling to hurt an old friend's feelings even if he were fat and short and uninteresting.

"Have you remembered anything about the Duke of Perpignan?" asked the Earl. "I should like to have a clue to our anonymous friend."

Lord Marshall grew red, and looked uncomfortable.

"It was in Italy that I knew him—rather a tragic story. Lady Valerie, do look at that hideous woman who looks as if she were dressed in a yellow dressing-gown!"

"I would rather have the tragic story—tell me please."

He could not resist the entreaty in her eyes, so began against his better judgment,—

"A girl fell in love with an Englishman who did not care a brass button about her. He left Florence without waiting to say good-bye; she followed him, and died on a hillside."

Vaguely there flitted through Valerie's brain the fragments of another story, somewhat similar to this; a story told by Rex Verreker on the night of the ball. She listened with breathless attention, and Lord Marshall grew more and more uncomfortable under the eager glance of her large eyes, knowing that he was treading on dangerous ground.

"Go on."

"Suspicion fell on the Englishman, and he would have been tried for his life; but the Duke stoutly asserted that he was innocent, and defied the police to prove the contrary. There was little or no proof, and he escaped that time through Perpignan's friendship."

"You won't tell us his name?" said the Earl. "No, of course not; it wouldn't be fair to ask it. But is he in Paris now? I suppose I may ask that without any indiscretion!"

"I suspect he is," said Lord Marshall, gravely.

"Valerie, what is it? Do you feel faint? Shall I take you out?" and her father leant forward, looking much alarmed at her deathly face.

"No, no, it is nothing," passing her hand over her eyes, and with a great effort recovering her composure. "I want to hear the last act. Take no notice—I shall be all right."

They did not appear to take much notice, but all three were glad when the tenor died most musically at the feet of the soprano; and to the tones of a touching lament, the curtain fell amidst shouts of applause. There was a general movement, cloaks were found and wrapped round feminine shoulders, fans picked up, and flirtations dropped; then the gaily-dressed crowd streamed out on to the magnificent double staircase, and so descended slowly into the handsome hall below.

The Marquis gave his arm to Lady Valerie, and felt not a little proud of his compatriot. To his mind she looked like a lovely English rose, picked on a dewy morning, amongst a set of artificial flowers fresh from a shop window. The latter were very charming, but art had developed, and left nature out in the cold.

"I've dropped my handkerchief," said Valerie, suddenly, stopping still.

"You must have left it in the box. Shall I go, or send Marshall?"

"I don't want to trouble either of you. Where's papa?"

"Talking to a man with moustaches a yard long. I can't catch Marshall's eye, but I will in a moment. Stand with your back against this pillar." He placed her as he spoke against a marble column, and darted after the Viscount, who was making himself agreeable to a pretty girl in pink.

Directly the Marquis's broad back was turned a man wrapped in a light overcoat came up from behind the column, and held out a handkerchief edged with lace. "Is this yours, Lady Valerie?"

The tone of the voice made the blood run cold in her veins. She raised her eyes, and met those of Colonel Darrell fixed upon her with eager and reproach.

He did not say another word, but clasped the hand tight that she had held out for her handkerchief, and a subtle charm seemed to come from his eyes; a powerlessness crept over her limbs, and she would have sunk fainting at his feet if the Marquis had not bounded forward and caught her in his arms.

A crowd gathered round in the space of half a minute, but Colonel Darrell had vanished.

CHAPTER XIX.

IS IT AN ASSIGNATION?

"COME out for a drive, Valerie! It is quite chilly in the house, but outside the sunshine is delightful."

The Earl of Beaudesert had become anxious about his daughter once again. She had grown nervous and fanciful; and that morning, when a lovely bunch of lilies, tied up with white satin ribbon, had been sent to the hotel for Lady Valerie De Montfort, she had turned from it with a shudder.

"I would rather stay at home," looking out of the window with frightened eyes, as if she expected to see a ghost there. "You know I am going to the ball to-night, and I don't want to tire myself."

"A drive won't tire you—quite the reverse; so put on your hat, and I'll order the carriage."

"Oh, please not, papa. I really mean it," looking so desperately in earnest that he had no choice but to give in.

"If this goes on I must take her away again," he thought to himself, with a sigh, as a few minutes later he strolled along the cheerful streets. "I wonder if the opera was too much for her nerves! Something upset them last night, that is certain. Poor child, she looks quite miserable."

To occupy his time he went into the Chamber of Deputies to hear a debate, and was amused at the excitement of the speakers, and the little attention that was paid to the president's jingling bell.

The whole scene was utterly unlike a decorous English Parliament, though decorum even with us has grown out of date, and few people care to bridle their tongues with discretion. The debate lasted a long while, because a grey-headed man possessed himself of the tribune, whom nobody felt inclined to hear, but he was determined to keep to his post until he had disturbed his mind of a carefully prepared speech. Lord Beauchamp wondered if it would end in their taking him away by force, for several had already got so far as to shake their fists at him; but he grew tired of listening to constant noisy interruptions, and left them to fight it out as they liked best.

On the way back to his hotel he met the Marquis and Lord Marshall, just coming to leave the bouquet of Belton roses for Lady Valerie. They naturally inquired after her with interest, and were told that she looked pale and out of spirits.

"So I thought it best to leave her alone. I asked her to come for a drive, but she didn't care about it."

"No use taking anyone out if they don't like it," said the Marquis, sympathizingly.

"I should never leave her alone," remarked Lord Marshall with such earnestness that Daintree looked round at him in surprise. He saw the look and began to stammer. "Dall, you know—nobody to speak to—women like company."

"Not all women; but come in and see if you can cheer her up. Perhaps Daintree's roses will have the desired effect."

So saying, having reached the hotel, he led them up to his own apartments on the second floor, and opening the door of the *salon*, asked them to walk in. To his surprise, Lady Valerie was not there. He rang the bell for Beaumont, but a polite waiter appeared, who said that the valet had gone out. He asked for Susan, and the man went off at once to look for her, but after staying away for a long time he came back to say that—

"Mademoiselle Susanne was not to be found. The hall-porter had seen her go out on foot with *miladi*."

"Very extraordinary!" said the Earl; "I thought she had quite determined to stay at home."

"No doubt an end of ribbon was wanted for her dress to-night; women can't resist the pleasure of shopping in Paris."

"Valerie doesn't care for that sort of thing," still looking grave; "she's not like other girls."

"Shall we go and look for her?" asked Lord Marshall, with suppressed eagerness.

"No use in that, when we don't know what direction she has taken. It is so very late for her to be out. She never stays out after dusk unless I am with her."

The two friends went away, the Marquis leaving the bouquet of roses on the table. It was a great disappointment to him, for he had meant to place them in Lady Valerie's own small hand. When they got outside he stopped still, and looked at the Viscount searchingly.

"What have you got in your head?"

"Nothing," said the other, irritably; "I'm sick to death of your nonsense."

"Don't put yourself out," soothingly; "but just tell me the truth. Do you think that anything's up?"

"I don't understand you. Surely a girl may go out for a walk with her maid, without kicking up such a rumpus."

"Nobody wants to kick up a rumpus," very quietly. "Her father was surprised—so were you—I saw you turn as red as fire, and then go as white as your own collar—so you needn't deny it. Do you know where she has gone?"

"Not I; how could I?"

"Do you know where she is likely to be?"

"No, of course not. That is too absurd."

"If you don't know, let us divide and prowl about for the next half-hour—meeting here when

the time is up. Perhaps you may light upon her if I don't."

"All right, I've no objection to a stroll, and I'll keep my eyes open; but of course she will be in a carriage, and we shall both miss her."

They separated, Lord Marshall, angry with himself for having betrayed his own anxiety, Lord Daintree equally disturbed in mind, though he would have been puzzled to give a reason. He walked on deep in thought, jostling against the passers-by, who set him down with a shrug of their shoulders as "a rude Englishman." During the last few days his heart had gone out completely to the simple girl who charmed him at once with her open, sunny nature, and bewitching ways. She was no hardened coquette, trying her best to catch a coronet; but a pure-minded gentlewoman, always bent upon being courteous and kind to her father's guests, and ready to treat the Marquis of Daintree as an old friend because the Earl had known him ever since his boyhood.

Neither his rank nor his fortune would influence her, but if he could only do something noble by which to win her respect, perhaps affection would follow, and love tread closely on its footsteps.

Miss Springold had insinuated that there was "something" in the background with a woman's vagueness, and all a pretty girl's spite, but he did not believe a word of it. One look into Valerie De Montfort's eyes was sufficient to tell anyone but a fool that she was pure as a babe that has never left its mother's arms.

Thinking over these things deeply, as was his wont, and only giving hurried glances at the roadway when a carriage passed, he found himself in a narrow street where he had never been before. It was badly lighted, and the pavement was far from clean. Altogether it had rather a disreputable air, and the people who were loitering about it seemed to belong to that class which resembles the owl in its habits.

"The sooner I get out of this the better," he thought to himself, as he wondered how he had come there; "this would be a fine gutter out of which to pick such a diamond!" He walked on briskly, attracted by some lamps at the end, which seemed to belong to a well-lighted thoroughfare. He could not identify it at the moment, but he supposed he should when he reached it.

On his way he was surprised to pass two horses—a dapper-looking groom was on one and leading the other, a remarkably fine-looking chestnut.

"Evidently the owner of the chestnut has gone to a rendezvous, and wishes to keep his horses out of sight," and the Marquis smiled contemptuously, as if he had never done such a thing in his life.

He was passing a church further on, and he cast a glance up at its arched window, illuminated by faint rays from some shrine behind the old grey walls darkened by age. He thought of the days when he was a little boy, and his mother used to take him by the hand and lead him to church. It was not often now that he darkened its doors, but if he married Valerie De Montfort he would turn over a new leaf, and make himself fitter to go through life by an angel's side. Even as he thought it his heart gave a bound, for he heard the soft, sweet voice which he had meant to lure him heavenward! He stopped still, and his heart seemed to stop at the same time; framed in the arch of the grey stone porch was the figure of Valerie De Montfort. The light of a lamp fell full on her face, which was deathly pale, and tears were streaming down her cheeks, as she pleaded as if for her life. She was standing on the top of the steps, and a man with a perfectly chiselled profile, which seemed familiar to him, and eyes that glowed with ardent passion, was on a lower step, holding her hands in his!

"A pair of lovers—as any fool could see!" Lord Daintree turned away with a sickening sense of disappointment, and retraced his steps, his head bent down, his gait uncertain, and very unlike his usual firm tread. "Women were all alike," he thought savagely, "and none but a lunatic would trust them." Still he must do his best

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JANUARY was termed the Wolf-month by the Saxons, as during this month (usually the coldest of the year) the wolves grew especially daring and ferocious.

THERE is nothing on the Thames like the Ginelle lock on the Seine, which a man can open or shut by simply touching an electric button as he sits comfortably in his office.

not to betray her secret, and to keep Marshall off the scent; so he walked back again to the hotel, where they had agreed to meet, and tried his hand at dissembling.

(To be continued.)

FACETIÆ.

"WHAT'S good for a cold in the head?" "A handkerchief."

The silent watches of the night are presumably those which their owners neglected to wind up.

AFTER marriage a man stops paying his wife compliments and begins paying her bills.

PECK: "That tramp says he is looking out for work." Mrs. P.: "Probably he is—so that he can dodge it."

TOMPKINS: "Would you like to have the world at your feet?" Smith: "I have. I'm not standing on my head, am I?"

"JONES says his wife has one saving quality as a cook." "What is that?" "She doesn't try."

"GREEK doors opened outward." "I suppose the Greeks used them to knock rate-collectors off the front steps."

"I'm always worried when Henry begins saving string." "Why?" "It makes me think he has been doing something extravagant in business."

"AUNT EMBELINE, what would you do if you opened your eyes at night and saw the dark form of a burglar moving stealthily around in your room?" "I'd shut my eyes."

JACK: "And how did you come to marry him?" "I didn't come to marry him," answered the womanly little woman, indignantly. He came to marry me."

LADY: "I wish to get a birthday present for my husband." Shopman: "How long married?" Lady: "Ten years." Shopman: "All the bargains are on the right, madam."

"YOU'VE been a fool all your life," exclaimed the excited husband. "You seem to forget, dear, that I refused you three times before we were married," said the wife, quietly.

"It seems to me that in such a wet climate as the Transvaal our soldiers should tar their tents to make them waterproof." "Well, we are often told that they pitched their tents."

"WHEN Mr. Haight came to town everything he had was tied up in a bandanna handkerchief." "Yes?" "And now everything he has is tied up in his wife's name."

MAGISTRATE: "So you admit having been engaged in making counterfeit money?" Prisoner: "Yes, your Honour; you see the supply of the genuine article is so very, very short."

MAUD (before the laughing hyena's cage): "How mean! Here we've been twenty minutes, and the hyena hasn't laughed once!" Ella: "Strange, and he's been eyeing your spring hat, too!"

JAGGLES: "What do you think of this discussion as to doctors intentionally killing off incurable patients?" Waggles: "I don't think it is nearly so important as their unintentionally killing off curable ones."

"What did they do with Joseph's coat of many colours?" asked the Sunday-school teacher. "Cut it down and made it over for Benjamin," answered a pensive little boy at the end of the seat.

THE FAIR ONE: "I suppose you will marry, though, when the golden opportunity offers, won't you?" The Cautious One: "It will depend upon how much gold there is in the opportunity."

GREAT EMPLOYER: "I always employ married men if possible." His Friend: "Good idea. Helps conserve that sacred institution, the home." "I hadn't given that a thought, but I guess it is so. I employ married men because they are more tractable."

PRISON VISITOR: "You are well treated here, are you not?" Convict: "No, I ain't." "I am surprised. Tell me what you wish the prison authorities to do for your comfort." "Lemme out."

MR. BROWN: "Good morning, Mr. Jones; how's your wife?" Mr. Jones (who was deaf, and thought a remark had been made about the weather): "Very blustering and disagreeable again this morning."

YOUNG HUSBAND (meeting his wife at the railway station): "Didn't I telegraph you not to bring your mother with you?" Young Wife: "I know. That's what she has come to see you about. She read the telegram."

FATHER (to son from whom he has just accepted a cigar): "Excellent! How much did you pay?" Son: "They're three for a shilling." "Great Scott! And I content myself with five for a shilling!" "That's a different matter. If I had as large a family as you to support I shouldn't smoke at all."

"I'm afraid I shall have to stop giving Robby that tonic the doctor left him." The Father: "Why! Isn't he any better?" "Oh, yes! But he slid down the banisters six times this morning, broke the hall-lamp, two vases, a jug, and a looking-glass; and I don't feel as if I could stand much more."

CINCILLY: "Look here, old man, why don't you offer me back the £5 I let you have a year ago?" Hardupps: "Oh, I would if I hadn't been afraid of hurting your feelings." "In what way?" "Why, I didn't like to give you the impression that I thought you needed the money."

"No," she answered coldly, "I cannot marry a man who carries a horse-shoe for luck!" For a moment he contemplated her in intense silence; but only for a moment. "Who," he exclaimed, "now can doubt the efficacy of the horse-shoe after this!" Then he left her for ever, passing only to laugh the wild, mirthless laugh which was suitable to the occasion.

COUNTRY DOCTOR (catechizing): "Now, little boy, what must we all do in order to enter Heaven?" Boy: "Die." Country Doctor: "Quite right; but what must we do before we die?" Boy: "Get sick and send for you!"

MAMMA (to Tommy): "I'm sorry you and your sister quarrelled over that orange, and that James had to interfere. Whose part did he take?" Tommy: "Whose part! He took the whole orange."

TOFFER: "Have a cigar, old boy. I'm afraid, though, these are not very good. In fact, they may be worse than those I gave you last." Friend (in a burst of politeness): "Impossible, my dear boy, impossible."

EMPLOYMENT AGENT: "Why do you leave a place in which you have worked so many years?" Domestic: "Well, you see, the missus died last month." "The house is lonely now, I suppose." "Tain't that; but now the missus is dead, the master blames everything on me."

COLONEL YERGER: "Why is it that the ladies of a congregation always present the pastor with embroidered slippers and suspenders?" Mrs. Yerger: "The suspenders are to keep up his trousers, so that the embroidered slippers can be seen. How stupid you are."

INDIGNANT PHYSICIAN: "Man, what have you done! You sent my patient the wrong prescription and it killed him." Druggist (a calm man, accustomed to abuse): "Vhail, what vas der madder mit you! Last week I send your odder patient der right berscription, und dot killed him. How can somebody blame sooch a man?"

SEX: "This is an awfully long play. The hero does not marry the heroine until the close of the fifth act. Five acts are too many." He: "But you forget this is a modern love story, and the scene is laid in the present day. An author must make his play natural and true to life. Formerly love plays were quite short; but nowadays the men are so shy from being hunted so much, that it takes the most attractive woman a long time to run a man down and capture him."

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SOCIETY.

THE Princess of Wales will visit Naples, Palermo, Corfu and Athens, where she will make a stay till the first week in April, when she travels to Copenhagen for the birthday of her father. Meanwhile, the two Princesses will sail for a cruise in the Mediterranean until the time comes for re-embarking their Royal mother at Trieste.

AMONG the Queen's many little fancies is a curious custom of purchasing large quantities of any trifle that happens to catch her fancy, and bestowing one on each of her friends. Some time ago a most fascinating little bookmarker charmed Her Majesty, who promptly ordered several dozens. It was a little silver clip with a ship engraved on it. Underneath was written the legend, "Here I cast anchor." This little knick-knack is now in use among Her Majesty's friends.

THE Queen's apartments at the Hôtel Angeli, Bordighera (including the whole of the east wing), are engaged for Her Majesty from March 1st for two months. The furniture which is to go out has been removed from Windsor Castle to Buckingham Palace, and will be despatched direct from London to Bordighera at the end of February, with the servants, horses, carriages, and heavy luggage. The Queen is to arrive at Bordighera, according to present arrangements, on the evening of either Wednesday, the 7th, or Thursday, the 8th of March.

PRINCE HENRY OF PRUSSIA will land at Genoa when he arrives in Europe, and is to pay a brief visit to the Empress Frederick at Lerici before proceeding to Germany to join his wife and children at Kiel. Prince and Princess Henry will probably spend several weeks of next summer in the Isle of Wight, and it is expected that they will occupy one of the Royal residences in the park at Osborne, most likely Osborne Cottage. Prince Henry will bring his yacht to Cowes. He is to spend a few days at Athens with his sister the Duchess of Sparta, on his way home.

WHILE the Tear and Tearitz crave in vain for an heir, the Tsar's sister, the Grand Duchess Xenia, continues to give birth to sons only. A third boy has just been added to her family, and the little fellow was at once visited by his Imperial uncle. The Grand Duchess Xenia used to be considered very like her aunt, the Princess of Wales, of whom she was particularly fond; but possibly because she has endured very great anxiety on account of the health of her husband, who is consumptive, the Grand Duchess has become very thin and worn, and the likeness is far less noticeable than it was.

THE Kaiser's children are noted for their courteous manners, and are most considerate for everyone who comes in contact with them. The little Princess Victoria of Germany is said to have a decided will of her own, and will sometimes take a fancy to stand up in the Royal carriage, when she is driving in Berlin with one of her ladies-in-waiting. The decorous lady-in-waiting will implore her to sit down, but the little Princess will get up again, like a jack-in-the-box, if the fancy takes her to do so. She is a very warm-hearted little child, however, and can easily be ruled through her affections. It is no wonder if she is a little spoilt—the long-dearled little girl, and the only one in a family of seven.

EVERYBODY has seen photographs of the Queen wearing her simple "mushroom" hat, which, though it may not be fashionable, serves the purpose of shading the eyes and neck perhaps better than any other hat. It is to the Queen that we owe the popularisation of hats for town and carriage wear. At one time ladies never dreamt of wearing hats for visiting or driving, other than in the country, and it was considered quite out of place to wear them in London, bonnets being as much *de rigueur*, as tall shiny hats have always been considered in town for gentlemen. Soon after the Queen's marriage she began to wear hats chosen for comfort, which drooped over the eyes and came down well at the back, as a shade to the neck from the sun's rays.

STATISTICS.

400,000 fighting men can be called into the field by Canada.

THE population of the earth at the time of the Emperor Augustus is estimated at 54,000,000. It is now estimated to be about 1,580,000,000.

SOUTH AFRICA is still a black-man's land. South of the Zambesi there are 750,000 whites and about 8,000,000 blacks—that is, the proportion is ten to one.

ACCORDING to the last return there is £262,772 standing to the credit of bluejackets in ship's books or at the dockyards. The number of depositors is 23,000. Each man, on the average, has therefore over £10 to his credit.

GEMS.

WE grow narrow in our views when we do not welcome thoughts and natures remote from our own.

WE love to expect, and when expectation is either disappointed or gratified, we want to be again expecting.

OF all virtues, magnanimity is the rarest; there are a hundred persons of merit for one who willingly acknowledges it in another.

THE feeling, sympathetic, generous heart which recognises the rights and claims and worthy endeavours of others, which is pained by their suffering and rejoices in their joy, is the only trustworthy source of that social morality on which general well-being depends.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

A RICH SEED CAKE.—Take a pound and a quarter of flour, well dried, a pound of butter, a pound of loaf sugar, beat and sifted, eight eggs, and two ounces of caraway seeds, one grated nutmeg, and its weight in cinnamon. Beat the butter into a cream, put in the sugar, beat the whites of the eggs and the yolks separately, then mix them with the butter and sugar. Beat in the flour, spices, and seed, a little before you put it in the oven. Bake it two hours in a quick oven.

HUNTER'S SOUP.—This is a very dark, rich soup, supposed to be made of all game, but in reality is best made of all the game and meat (left-over portions of cooked meats being particularly desirable), including lean ham, chicken carcasses, anything, everything, one may have on hand. Having the stock ready, fry some diced vegetables (onions, carrots, turnips, celery, &c.) in bacon fat until dark brown, dredge well with flour, and when the flour is browned also add the contents of the pan to the stock, allowing the whole to cook for twenty minutes; cool, and remove all fat that may accumulate. Warm up and serve with croutons.

FILLETS OF BEEF WITH OYSTERS.—Get one and a half pounds of fillet of beef, and cut it into neat rounds about the size of the top of a tumbler, and one inch thick. Melt one ounce of butter in a pan, put in half an ounce of flour, and fry a good brown in the butter. Then add two tablespoonfuls of good gravy, half a tablespoonful of walnut and mushroom ketchup, and a little Worcester sauce. Just allow it to come to the boil, stirring it well. Now add half a Spanish onion, chopped fine, and three small pickled walnuts cut in slices. Lay in the fillets, and simmer very gently for three quarters of an hour. Be sure and not allow it to boil. Directly before serving put in one dozen oysters, and strain in their liquor. The oysters must be bearded. Dish up the fillets in two straight lines down a hot dish. Put the oysters between the two lines, and pour the sauce over.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE Japanese, in muddy weather, provide themselves with stilts four inches high.

A DOCTOR with cavalry experience has invented a patent galloping hospital, drawn by two horses, and capable of accommodating six wounded.

FOOTLIGHTS were first introduced on the English stage by David Garrick, who borrowed the practice from Italy.

THIS jellyfish has no teeth, but uses himself as if he were a piece of paper when he is hungry, getting his food and then wrapping himself about it.

PUBLIC drinking-troughs for horses are condemned by a well-known veterinary surgeon on the ground that they propagate certain diseases peculiar to horses.

THE culture of perfume-bearing plants and trees, known as "scent farming," is a profitable industry in Australia, where the soil is particularly suitable for the cultivation of such plants.

AUSTRALIAN savages eat the green ants raw. They stamp upon an ant-hill until the ants run up their legs, when they scrape them off as fast as they come up and transfer them to their mouths.

DOCTORS are easily made in China. Any person in want of a livelihood who can read and write well enough to be able to copy out prescriptions from a medical book can set up in practice without fear of Government interference.

IN killing game the Boers use a bullet of which the lead point is exposed so that it "mushrooms" when it strikes. On entering the bullet expands and tears an ugly hole. If it strikes sideways the effect is horrible.

A FAVOURITE Boer sport is to dig a hole in the ground and put a turkey into it. Then they cover the pit with a cloth with a hole in it just big enough to let out the turkey's head. The head of the unfortunate bird is used as a target.

A BOER farm and homestead is, it is said, to be one of the features of the Paris Exhibition. In this form will be exhibited the chief wild animals of the Transvaal. The means of transportation in the country are also to be illustrated.

A PETRIFIED forest, covering an area of 100 square miles, has existed for centuries in Arizona. Thousands and thousands of petrified logs strewn the ground, and represent beautiful shades of pink, purple, red, grey, blue, and yellow. One of the stone-trees spans a gulf forty feet wide.

FAIR HAIRED people are becoming less numerous than formerly. The ancient Jews were a fair-haired race; now they are, with some exceptions, dark. So it is in a lesser degree with the Irish, among whom 150 years ago a dark-haired person was almost unknown.

PEOPLE marvel at the mechanism of the human body, with its 462 bones and sixty arteries. But man is simple in this respect compared with the carp. That remarkable fish moves no fewer than 4366 bones and muscles every time it breathes. It has 4,320 veins, to say nothing of its ninety-nine muscles.

THE Eiffel Tower is being put in readiness for the Exposition. It is to be given a coat of enamel paint in five shades, graduated from lemon chrome on the summit to deep orange on the pedestal. Two coats will be applied, for which nearly fifty tons of enamel will be required.

ONE of the curiosities of the Bank of England is to be seen in the printing room. A man sits at a desk and every three seconds a machine delivers to him two complete five-pound notes. If he sits there six hours he receives over 70,000 pounds, and in three hundred days over 20,000,000 pounds sterling.

JUST when the day became divided into hours is not known; nor is the process explained. The Greeks and Romans measured time by the water-glass and the sun-dial. The hour-glass, filled with sand, was the outgrowth of these vessels, from which the water dripped through tiny openings.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

A. M.—Write to War Office, Pall Mall.

ANXIETY.—Most certainly, marriage is legal and binding.

RALPH.—If you are not content, you could apply to a magistrate.

QUANTITE.—All the children take equal shares in the absence of a will.

PATERFAMILIAS.—You are not responsible for your son's business debts.

WORKED MOTHER.—A youth of fifteen would not be accepted in the militia.

H. J. T. (Stroud).—Sir George White was appointed to South Africa last year.

I. V.—The executor is allowed by law a year to get in the estate and wind it up.

HIGHLANDER.—The feather bonnet worn on the Highland regiments costs about £3.

INQUIRY.—No one could say without seeing it. You had better take it to a picture-cleaner.

N. D. M.—Write to Agent-General for Cape of Good Hope, Victoria Street, S.W., for information.

JONAH.—"Sniping" is firing by sharpshooters wherever they see an enemy's head or limb.

INDISCREET PARENT.—It is always usual to require notice before a pupil is removed from a school.

ALIKE.—Any attempt would be liable to injure the whole cloth. We cannot say what would be best.

J. H.—We cannot at present obtain the dimensions you require. The vessel was recently broken up.

IN SOME TROUBLE.—There can be no second marriage until the first wife or husband is dead or divorced.

N. E.—Buy a form from a stationer's. No stamps are necessary, or fees, unless you employ a solicitor.

LOOKING TO HELP.—Only experienced nurses would be of any service in South Africa at the present time.

IN DEPAIR.—Marry the man you love, and who is able to keep you, and brave all the other consequences.

ANGELA.—Wring a clean cloth out of cold water, lay it over the hat, and iron with a rather hot flat-iron till dry.

A SOLDIER'S SISTER.—It is now early summer in the Transvaal, the season being at the height about New Year.

DORIS.—Dissolve a teaspoonful of oxalic acid in a teacupful of hot water; rub the stained part well with the solution.

SAILOR BOY.—Methuen is variously pronounced in two or three syllables; but "Methune" is the common pronunciation.

NANCY LEE.—Practically the same outfit as if the young woman were going out as nurse or waiting-maid to a situation on shore.

B. M.—This may be prevented by whitewashing yearly, mixing with the wash as much copperas as will give it a clear yellow hue.

BARBARA.—Your best course would be to address a letter to the young lady's father, requesting permission to pay your addresses to her.

TACHTLED.—Acquaint your "engaged" lover with the fact that your sentiments respecting him have undergone a complete change.

BESSIE.—A flint sponge can be made as good as new by rubbing a lemon well into it and then rinsing in several lots of lukewarm water.

FLORENCE.—We cannot advise you to do anything better than wait with patience until the young man shall put the momentous question.

A. R. C.—Chief Commissioner of Metropolitan Police is appointed by Home Secretary, otherwise police are not directly under the Government.

AMBER.—Amber is washed up by the sea on the shores of the Baltic, and is also obtained by digging up the "blue earth" strata on that coast.

IN WANT OF ADVICE.—You ought to demand an explanation, and if one is refused, it is unsatisfactory, you may consider that you have been lifted.

TILLY.—We hardly know how to advise, since you seem to have already done all that is possible to alleviate your complaint. Perhaps you drink too much water.

UNHAPPY ONE.—Dispose of your own property exactly as you wish, only you should employ a respectable solicitor to execute the will and obviate all chance of dispute.

F. C. S.—Parents are not responsible for damage done by their children. If the damage can be shown to have been wilful, the child can be summoned before a magistrate.

R. H.—Parent is not in law bound to replace a pane of glass accidentally broken by his young son; it is a risk the owner of the pane should have protected himself against by insurance.

PATRICIA.—A little vinegar added to the water will revive and preserve the colour in washing clothes. The best plan is to put it in the last rinsing water, and it should be added in the proportion of one tablespoonful of vinegar to each quart of cold water.

COOKIE.—A dish of vinegar on the back of the stove where it will not get too hot will absorb all disagreeable odours from boiling vegetables, such as cabbages, cauliflower, turnips, &c.

RED, WHITE AND BLUE.—British ships must show the national flag the moment they enter waters dominated by other nations; in times of war the flag has to be exhibited on the wide ocean.

ACORN.—Dissolve a teaspoonful of carbonate of soda in a pint of water, dip a piece of material of the same colour as the dress in the water when the soda is dissolved, and rub the mud spots with it.

AMBITIOUS NAW.—This is not a time for any young women to think of going out to South Africa in search of situations; business is utterly disorganised; the coast towns are crowded with refugees.

M. G.—A cubic foot of fresh water weighs 62½ pounds; salt water 64 pounds; a gallon weighs 10 pounds; the gramme is the standard of unit of French measures of weight, and is equal to 15.43248 grains troy.

ATLANTA.—First obtain a thoroughly good education, which would be essential to you on the stage. When you are three or four years older it will be ample time for you to decide upon your vocation in life.

MOLLIE.—Make a paste of fuller's earth and ammonia and spread it over the stains, rubbing well in if they are very bad. Leave till dry, and wash in cold water before soaping in the usual way.

INDIGNATION.—The practice of shooting off-hand all armed men who may be found in a country in a state of war, and who do not belong to the regular forces of a belligerent Government, is sanctioned by military law.

JACK O' LANTHORN.

CAN you not see me careless? Can you not feel me weak?

Dear hands upon my heartstrings, dear lips upon my cheek.

Out of a world of wandering men is this the man you seek.

These eyes that look through yours, my dear, have looked into the pit, Will look again, and yet again, and linger over it.

Are lights, my love, o' nights, my love, not all in Heaven lit?

If I am Jack o' Lanthorn, sweet, however, you draw nigh.

I cannot warm you, but must see you cold until you die.

Will you not choose a homely hearth to sit and warm you by?

You choose the wildfire even so! You follow where I go?

Oh, sweet heart and soft heart, made strong for me to know,

Although I go I will return; although I change and grow.

Or change and lessen, on your heart my wayward heart I stay;

Your steady light my wandering light shall draw and feed and away;

And I will love you, sweet, as well as Jack o' Lanthorn may.

B. K.—The hotel-keeper is not bound to tolerate the presence of any individual he or she objects to, and in event of the offensive person refusing to leave the premises, or insisting on forcing his way in, the police can be called to remove him.

GERARD.—Boring holes in glass is not a very difficult operation. Use a hard steel tool on a surface which has previously been freely moistened with turpentine in which as much camphor has been dissolved as possible.

MOLLIE.—Get a glass jar with an air-tight cover. Put the cover firmly on and shake vigorously. A tiny pinch of salt and a little lemon-juice helps to make it turn; but do not shake too long, or you may find it has developed into butter.

BESSIE.—They should never be touched with water, either hot or cold, as it makes the surface likely to crack. Rub them gently all over with a little olive-oil, polish with dry dusters, then rub with dry flour, and again polish.

CONSTANT READER.—Unless absolutely dry the heat of the hands will soon soften it as you work and knead it well between the palms, but if too dry, add a very little oil and work that well in for half an hour or more till you get it quite pliable, soft and smooth.

SAD AT HEART.—Any additional act of bravery which would have won the Victoria Cross for its holder had he not already possessed it is signalled by a bar or clasp being added to the ribbon just above the bar from which the Cross is suspended. The Cross carries with it a pension of £10 a year, and an additional £5 is given for each bar.

ANNA.—First hang the skirt in a warm room, but not near a fire, till it is thoroughly dry. Then loosen the mud spots by rubbing them with the edge of a penny, and brush with a moderately stiff brush. If the mud marks still show, sponge the spots with benzine or ammonia and water, using a piece of the same material as the dress if possible.

W. R.—Dissolve the soap in boiling water, and when the water is about or just under 100 degrees Fahrenheit, put the things in to soak, covering the tub or vessel to keep in the steam. Allow them to soak for an hour, then move them briskly up and down in the water for a few minutes, rinse them well in lukewarm water, and dry them quickly.

FOOTLIGHTS.—We strongly advise you to give up all thoughts of the stage. It is an arduous profession, full of temptations, and where one succeeds, hundreds fail. If you persist in your idea, however, the only way to obtain a foothold is to apply to one of the agencies, the addresses of which you will find in the dramatic papers.

TRICKER.—You ought not to accept an offer of that kind without knowing something more of what you are going to. Get some one to make thorough inquiries for you, and until that is done, by no means give up your present situation. You appear to be fairly comfortable where you are at present, and any change may be for the worse.

DARCY.—Purveyors are usually selected from the office staffs of the shipping companies, their intimate acquaintance with the business, and knowledge of the firm's customers specially fitting them for the position; of course, an outsider may occasionally be taken on, and you must just take your chance of being successful in your application to the heads of any firm whose service you desire to enter.

"TOMMY'S" MOTHER.—The flint gun vanished with last century; at Waterloo our troops were armed with the old muzzle loader known as "Brown Bess," that was the weapon with which we may be said to have fought our way to fame and the forefront among nations; after that came the Enfield rifle, also a muzzle loader; after that, again the Snider, a breech-loader, about 1860; the Martini-Henry and the Lee-Metford have each in turn been the weapon of choice.

TON.—The celebrated charge of the Light Brigade in the Crimea, "magnificent but not war," as the onlooking French general declared, came about through a misunderstanding of orders issued by Lord Raglan; who was to blame for it could not be known, because Major Nolan, the aide-de-camp who carried the message, and is supposed to have given it incorrectly to the general in command of the brigade, charged along with the force, and was among the first to fall.

AGNES.—Do not scrape them till you have tried every other means to remove the burnt portions. Fill with cold water, and let soak for several hours. Then fill with fresh cold water, and add, if you have them, a heaped tablespoonful of wood ashes. Soda may be used instead, but is not so good. Now place the saucepan on a cool part of the stove, and let it boil up very slowly. When it boils empty the water away, and scrub with a stiff brush. Repeat if necessary.

D. G.—Rub hard soap well on to the spot, and then scrub it out with a brush dipped in clean cold water. The brush then rinsed out in a separate pail of water; again dip into the clean, cold water, and scrub till clean, and as soon as clean rub the place quite dry with a cloth. Another method is to lay a little damp fuller's earth over the stain. Let it stand on the place for some time; then gently rub it in, after which wash it off with water to which a little ammonia carbonate has been added; this restores the colour in most cases.

YOUNG MOTHER.—Take a large box with sides just high enough for baby to take hold of while standing. Pad the box carefully with a brightly coloured quilt, taking particular care to see that no wood is visible for baby to get spindlers from, and it is quite ready for use, either in the house or out. Here baby is safe from draughts; he can learn to creep, to raise himself to his feet and walk, and when tired of that exercise can have his toys and play with them in the bottom of the box, and scatter them about to his heart's content, and yet always have them within his reach.

BROWNIE.—Put some boiling water on a dinner plate, place the ink stain on the plate in the water, sprinkle over it some oxalic acid, let it lie for a short time; you may require to repeat this once more; if this fails—and with some qualities of ink it does fail—then liquid chloride of lime applied in exactly the same way will certainly succeed. Liquid chloride of lime is made thus:—Get pennyworth of chloride of lime and put it in a dish with one pint of water; stir it with a stick, and keep stirring it now and again for half an hour; let it then settle, and strain through muslin; the liquid is good to remove scorching or stains from linen.

THE LONDON READER can be sent to any part of the world, post-free, Three-halfpence Weekly; or Quarterly, One Shilling and Eightpence. The yearly subscription for the Monthly Part, including Christmas Part, is Eight Shillings and Eightpence, post-free.

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ALL LETTERS to BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER, 35, Catherine Street, Strand, W.C.

We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

THE PLUMBER AND THE DOCTOR.

THE fellow who in a particular emergency knows just what to do—he is the man we want to see. That is why, when the water-pipes burst, we send for the plumber, and when we fall suddenly ill we send for the doctor.

The plumber commonly makes a good job of it, and the doctor often does too. But a man in pain, and perhaps dangerously out of condition, is harder to repair than is a lead pipe with a split in it; so we have a right to expect more of the plumber than of the doctor. The man of medicine may have worn his eyes out reading medical books, and gone round the country all his life looking after the sick; and yet cases turn up that put him to his trumps, and make him scratch his head with worry and vexation. And this category takes in the most learned physicians in the world. Yes, and the longest-headed lawyers as well—in their line of work.

Now, Mrs. Warrender consulted four doctors—all good men—one after another. They felt her pulse and asked questions. They looked wise and confident, but proved unable to relieve her. The reason of their failure reflects no blame on them.

"For over ten years," the lady says, "I suffered greatly from indigestion and sluggish liver. I had a deal of pain in my back, chest, and side—more particularly after meals. There was a bad taste in my mouth, and my tongue was thickly coated with fur.

"As for eating, I almost fell out of the habit of it. I did not want anything to eat. I would sit down to the table, but not touch a morsel. There was no energy or strength left in me; I was low, miserable, and depressed.

"After a time I came to have sharp pains around the heart, and they frightened me. I thought may be the heart was gone wrong and I might die of it, as we hear of people doing so often.

"If one can only sleep at night it is easier to bear things; but there! *my* sleep was not the good rest I used to have. I don't believe that I got two hours' sound sleep at one time once a month. Naps and dozes, separated by wakefulness, or vexed by bad dreams—that was the way the nights went.

"Of course in the morning I felt used up and exhausted. How else could it be? I took no pleasure, and did no work in the way I did before this wretched complaint took hold of me.

"I consulted one doctor after another—four in all—but their medicines did not seem to go to the spot. It is no more than fair to say they made me feel a bit better now and then, but what I mean is they did not reach deep down where the disease was, that went on day by day getting worse.

"Shilling after shilling I spent for medicines, and how many pounds they ran up into, during those tedious ten years, I had no courage to figure out. I finally thought of myself as a confirmed invalid—a woman doomed to pass the rest of life in the shadow of illness and the solitude it carries with it.

"But better things were coming, although I did not know it. In July, 1898, a man left at our house a small book telling about Mother Seigel's Syrup, and what it had done for people afflicted with the same disease as mine. Having been ill so long, and used so many medicines only to be disappointed in them, it could not be expected I should have faith in this one; yet I made up my mind to try it.

"In a few days I felt much relieved. The pain was not so bad, and I actually had a wish for food for the first time in many a day. I ate something, and had no trouble to digest it. The food warmed and strengthened me, and when I had taken three bottles of 'Mother Seigel' I felt better than I ever remember.

"I now enjoy excellent health, for which I have to thank Mother Seigel's Syrup. It was my misfortune not to have heard of it years before I did. As a remedy for ailments of the stomach and liver there is, in my opinion, nothing to compare with it."—E. Warrender, 77, Chelmsford Road, Queen's Road, Walthamstow, Essex, July 13, 1899.

With the proper tools any plumber can repair a fractured water-pipe, and with the proper remedies any doctor can cure disease. The medical men failed in this case, not from ignorance of the complaint, but from lack of the remedy that cures it. When Mrs. Warrender found the remedy she cured herself: And so can anybody.